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Film Quarterly

This Is Not a Dance (Performance)

"It should make a magnificent movie."

Spectacle or Eco-Disaster?

CLOSE UP

The Demise of Digital

REVIEWS

Two Brothers

9 Songs

NATURE: UP CLOSE AND POLITICAL

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EDITOR'S NOTE

With this issue, we announce two additions to the *Film Quarterly* editorial board, Christine Acham and Lisa Parks. They will bring new expertise and experience to our peer review process, and we welcome and are grateful for their participation. Christine Acham is Associate Professor in the African American and African Studies Program at the University of California, Davis. Her book *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* was published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2004; she recently co-edited the inaugural issue of *Screening Noir: A Journal of Black Film, Television and New Media Culture* entitled *Blaxploitation Revisited*. Lisa Parks is Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is the author of *Cultures in Orbit* (Duke University Press, 2005) and co-editor of *Planet TV* (New York University Press, 2003). Her research explores media cultures and technologies in transnational contexts.

With the help of these new board members, we look forward to embracing new ideas and to continuing our investigation into all aspects of the art, science, history, culture, and theory of film.

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COVER PHOTOS

March of the Penguins (p. 4); (inset) *Passio* (p. 3).

PAGE ONE PHOTOS

Clockwise from top left: *Dance Dance Revolution* (p. 22); *Two Brothers* (p. 52); *The Head of a Pin* (p. 4); *Hellfighters* (p. 44); *9 Songs* (p. 59).

CLOSE UP PHOTO

Passio (p. 3).

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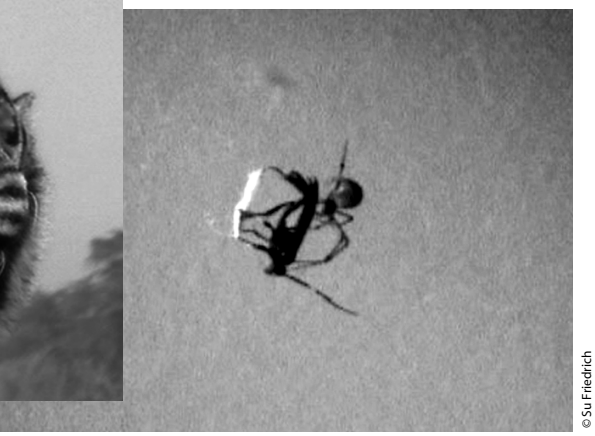

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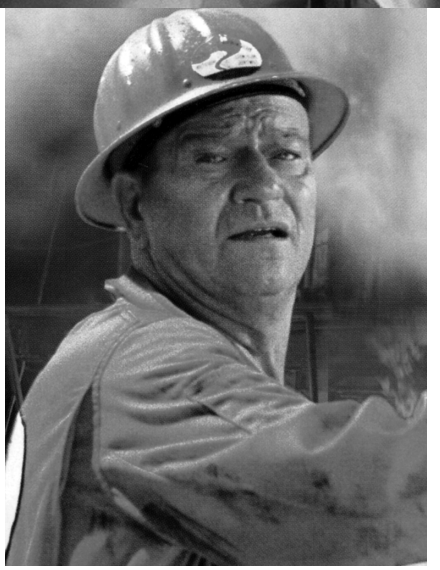

Film Quarterly

Volume 59 · Number 3 · Spring 2006

■ **CLOSE UP**

Paolo Cherchi Usai
The Demise of Digital (Print #1) **3**

■ **ARTICLES**

Scott MacDonald
Up Close and Political: Three Short Ruminations on Ideology in the Nature Film **4**

Irene Chien
This Is Not a Dance **22**

David Welky
Global Hollywood Versus National Pride: The Battle to Film *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* **35**

Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann
The First Eco-Disaster Film? **44**

■ **FILM REVIEWS**

Derek Bousé
Two Brothers **52**

Melanie Williams
9 Songs **59**

■ **BOOK REVIEWS** **64**

Paolo Cherchi Usai

The Demise of Digital (Print #1)

IF ALL GOES WELL, next year will see the completion of *Passio,* a 35mm silent feature I have been working on for some time. Predictably enough—I am a curator, not a film director—there is some archival footage in the mix; however, it will not be a "found footage" compilation—not in the sense in which moving images are used by artists such as Gustav Deutsch or Bill Morrison. Those who conclude I am again dwelling with early cinema and nitrate decay will be disappointed, as there is not a single frame of decomposed material in the film, and the few silent excerpts included in the work are incidental to the nature of the beast. It won't be a "silent film with live music," although the idea is to have a 27-piece ensemble performing in front of the screen; nor will it be a music concert with ancillary film clips, as seen recently in the abysmal *Cinéma fantastique,* a Spanish concoction attached to Hector Berlioz's popular classic.

As the blind man said, "We'll see." The reason for mentioning this project is tangential to the purpose of the film itself: *Passio* will be printed in a few copies, after which I will destroy its negative. In a strange way, that's my new term of engagement with the digital ideology, an oblique attempt to move beyond the notion of its "dark age" (a term borrowed from Stewart Brand for the subtitle of a book I wrote earlier this decade). I hasten to say that the disposal of the film matrix does not represent yet another subterfuge for endowing photochemical film with the aura of a museum object. Such privilege is being bestowed upon its non-analog successor through one of those intriguing paradoxes of culture: weary of loaning their works to a cinema venue for a few hundred bucks, video artists sell their DVDs to fine art museums for five- or six-digit figures, and get away with it. Matthew Barney brings his *Cremaster* cycle to the Guggenheim; Bill Viola displays the labels "Artist's Proof" or "Print 1 of 5" near his slow-motion remakes of Renaissance paintings, but tells me he has no intention of discarding the digital masters and actually gets a little impatient when I ask why there's an edition of five copies if he can always produce a sixth one identical to the others.

I remain convinced that digital is a questionable technology. However, as Brand pointed out, "the best way for doubters to control a questionable new technology is to embrace it, lest it remain wholly in the hands of enthusiasts who think there is nothing questionable about it" (*Technology Review,* May 2005). I see two ways of doing so in my own area of activity: first, by arguing that a fine arts museum—if that's where digital moving-image artworks end up—should be preoccupied as much with the apparatus that makes the exhibition of the digital work possible as with the work itself, and consider both as equal partners in its collections. To say that this is no different from the status attributed to a 35mm projector—or, say, a viola da gamba—is missing the point. There will be major works of art made for equipment similar to a video iPod, and if my nine-year-old niece will see it happening soon, maybe we should ask ourselves how we are going to reproduce or explain her experience 200 years from now, when iPods will be as archaic as a Moviola is nowadays. This may also provide us with a chance to divest ourselves of the prejudice that "content"—that obnoxious mantra of culture as commodity—is all that matters in the digital world.

My second strategy requires some effort of the imagination. Digital will eventually come to its point of demise. It is a historically determined phenomenon, and there are already signs of what may come next. This begs the question, How are we going to present a digital work in a world where digital is no longer a mode of production, nor a mode of consumption, of moving images? Curators of digital arts tend to look at their fellow analog specialists with a tinge of condescension, sure as they are of where their institutions' money is going. So far, I would have thought that if I were in their place I'd stop looking for the "specificity" of their mission (a mistake we are paying for dearly in the "analog" world of cinema) and look for curatorial advice in a nearby "analog" department of their institution—and do it soon. Now my impression is that "soon" is not fast enough. I don't see a good reason not to take advantage of the hard lesson we are learning with the decline of traditional movie projection and prepare for the day when we will be struggling to find the right venue for a proper digital screening. We weren't quick enough to do it with film; here's our second chance.

Paolo Cherchi Usai is Director of the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia. He is co-founder of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival and of the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation at George Eastman House. His latest book is *The Death of Cinema* (BFI, 2001).

■ SCOTT MACDONALD

Up Close and Political

THREE SHORT RUMINATIONS ON IDEOLOGY IN THE NATURE FILM

A few months ago I saw a film on TV, one of the Nova series I think, about spiders. I've never see anything more fascinating, or more visual. How can you possibly ignore such work? I'm delighted it's there, and I've always wanted to show it. And it's always worked very well, in terms of audiences.

—Amos Vogel[1]

PROBABLY NO SUBSTANTIAL dimension of film history that is so widely admired by a public audience and so frequently utilized in academic contexts has been so thoroughly ignored by film critics, historians, and theorists as the nature film (or, to use the current, more widely accepted term, the "wildlife film"): those films and videos that purport to reveal the lives of other species.[2] Indeed, the recent appearance of Gregg Mitman's *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (1999); Derek Bousé's *Wildlife Films* (2000), currently the definitive exploration of American wildlife cinema; and the beautiful book on the French nature-film pioneer, Jean Painlevé, *Science Is Fiction: The Films of Jean Painlevé* (2000), edited by Andy Masaki Bellows and Marina McDougall, with Brigitte Berg, are the exceptions that prove the rule. Until the appearance of these books, there had been a dearth of writing about nature film, at least within the annals of American film scholarship.[3] My guess is that while their colleagues in the sciences may show nature films, most academic film studies professionals barely consider nature film a part of film history. There are few better indications of the educationally counterproductive gap between the humanities and the sciences.

While one can hope that the three volumes mentioned above—along with the remarkable recent successes of *Winged Migration* (Jacques Cluzaud and Jacques Perrin, 2001), *Deep Blue* (Andy Byatt and Alastair Fothergill, 2003), and especially *March of the Penguins* (Luc Jacquet, 2005)—will instigate further exploration and exhibition of this neglected genre, the general attitude of film historians and scholars currently makes such a revival less than certain. The obvious location for serious thinking about the nature film, at least within academic film studies, would seem to be within the history and theory of documentary film. In fact, in the popular mind, few forms of filmmaking are more obvious instances of documentary than the nature film. But historians of documentary routinely ignore the nature film, for reasons articulated by Bill

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March of the Penguins—creating the record

Nichols.[4] For Nichols, the capacity of the photographic image to generate indexical representations of the world makes it valuable for scientific imaging, but cinema's very usefulness to science "depends heavily on minimizing the degree to which the image, be it a fingerprint or X-ray, exhibits any sense of perspective or point of view distinctive to its individual maker. A strict code of objectivity, or institutional perspective, applies. The voice of science demands silence, or near silence, from documentarian or photographer."[5] Since documentary requires a "voice of its own," according to Nichols—"voice of its own" meaning a clear or at least identifiable ideological position—nature film is by definition not part of documentary history.[6]

There are several problems with this position, and they grow increasingly evident the more fully modern society comes to terms with the many dimensions of the evolving environmental crisis. Of course it is true, as Nichols suggests, that nature films (science films in general) have historically pretended to objectivity. There are a variety of reasons for this. Since science is our cultural attempt to find out what aspects of the physical world can be known through observation and experimentation (that is, those aspects of the physical world that are verifiable regardless of ideology or belief), it is hardly surprising that scientific films have an aura of objectivity that is confirmed by the cinema's ability to make indexical, seemingly objective, records of sensory phenomena. But the moment a nature filmmaker begins to construct a particular film, there is no escaping point of view: filmmakers must choose what to show us and determine a filmic structure that exhibits a particular set of conclusions, whether they are those of an individual scientist, a group of scientists, or science-interested laypeople. The presumption of objectivity in science film is simply a particular instance of the aura of objectivity that documentary nearly always carries with it, and which, as Nichols has so often made clear in other contexts, must be qualified by the point of view that is explicit/implicit within any specific documentary.

A second reason for the widely held position that nature films are not really documentaries, and therefore not worth serious investigation within a film studies context, is historical, in at least two senses. First, until Mitman and Bousé, no American scholar had described a history of nature film or made an attempt to identify its pivotal moments and landmark contributions; even the valuable chronology of the wildlife film Bousé includes in *Wildlife Films* is limited in significant ways.[7] It is hard to take a genre seriously if one has no sense of it *as a genre*—and especially since nature films are rarely exhibited as instances of an evolving history. Second, since research into natural phenomena, and other species in particular, is ongoing, and since it is in the nature of new research to make previous research outmoded, nature films that may have seemed state-of-the-art at one point can seem outdated in a few years. This tendency is exacerbated by the fact that a good many nature films, especially those designed for use in primary and secondary schools, use strategies that may seem educational to one generation, but hopelessly corny to the next: Bruce Conner's recycling of material from outdated educational films in surreal montages (e.g., *Mongoloid,* 1978) has the impact it does because those older educational films now seem to reveal more about the absurdities of their era than about scientific information.

This essay makes no pretense of providing anything like a definitive sense of the nature film. I hope, however, that it usefully references a few of the important historical contributions to the genre as a way of foregrounding some of the issues raised in nature films and some aspects of their value in a film studies context. The nature film has, of course, a long prehistory and history that arguably begin with the dawn of the photographic motion picture: Eadweard Muybridge's breakthrough animal locomotion photographs and Zoopraxiscope demonstrations and Etienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographs used a variety of animal species as their primary subject matter. During the first decades of film history, there was a minor tradition of "animal fight films" that included *A Fight Between Spider and Scorpion* (Biograph, 1900) and *A Fight Between Wild Animals* (Kalem, 1912).[8] Films about wildlife, especially hunting films, were important early contributions to the development of the cinema audience. *Roosevelt in Africa* (1910), shot by Cherry Kearton during Theodore Roosevelt's African expedition in 1909, and the more melodramatic and popular fictionalized version of Roosevelt's hunting adventures, *Hunting Big Game in Africa* (1909) by Colonel Selig, instigated a genre of "bring 'em back alive" films that included *Paul Rainey's African Hunt* (1912), William Douglas Burden's footage of the Komodo dragon, and Martin and Osa Johnson's *Trailing African Wild Animals* (1923) and *Simba* (1927).[9] And, of course, exotic animals play pivotal roles in such early proto- or pseudo-ethnographic documentaries as Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1921) and *Moana* (1926), and Ernest Schoedsack and Meriam C. Cooper's *Grass* (1925) and *Chang* (1927). The mythic version of these early films is, of course, *King Kong* (1933), produced by Cooper and Schoedsack and based on their own and others' adventures filming in the wild.[10]

While the early films about hunting exotic wild animals and the symbiotic relationships between non-industrialized peoples and animals provoked, and continue to provoke, widespread debate about what is science and what is showmanship, there were also, at least from the 1910s on, attempts to use cinema to focus on the life cycles of other species, apart from their interaction with human society. Two particularly significant contributions to this history are the series of short films made by Jean Painlevé, beginning with *The Octopus* (*La Pieuvre*) in 1928 and concluding with *Acera, or the Witches' Dance* (*Acéra, ou le bal des sorcières*) in 1972; and the Walt Disney Studio's True-Life Adventures (in particular, those directed by James Algar), beginning with *Seal Island* (1948), *Beaver Valley* (1950), and *Nature's Half Acre* (1951), and culminating in a series of features, including the commercial breakthroughs *The Living Desert* (1953) and *The Vanishing Prairie* (1954). The Painlevé films and the Disney films could hardly be more different, especially in their exemplification of two very different attitudes with regard to the representation of other species in cinema.

DISNEY VERSUS PAINLEVÉ

Painlevé's pioneering efforts to demonstrate the potential of cinema in scientific experiment and to establish the nature film as a form that combines good science with entertainment and aesthetic awareness precede Disney's True-Life Adventure films by two decades. In the United States there is almost no awareness of Painlevé's contributions, while the Disney films are not only well known, but were formative for several generations of American children—and important for a good many adults as well. Independent filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky, for example, counts the early True-Life Adventures as one of the primary influences on his work:

> I had started to make films with an 8mm camera when I was around ten or eleven. I was very influenced by the Disney True-Life Adventure

> series, like *Beaver Valley* and *Nature's Half Acre*. They were the first time I saw, for instance, flowers growing in time-lapse—very photographic films, held together with music and narration. Both films went through the four seasons, and for some reason, I was very taken with that.[11]

I do not remember precisely when or where I first saw the early True-Life Adventures, but such characteristic elements as Winston Hibler's narrating voice, the use of an animated paint brush to introduce films, and the overall tenor remain deeply familiar artifacts of childhood.

Disney began producing wildlife films as a way of dealing with the financial problems created by the high cost of animation. While the series of animated features the Disney studio released during the 1940s were, and remain, immensely popular—*Pinocchio* (1940), *Fantasia* (1940), *Bambi* (1942), *Song of the South* (1946), and *Cinderella* (1949) were the five most popular films of that decade, according to the 2005 *New York Times Almanac*—the considerable cost of these features made them, at first, economically tenuous at best. During this financially strained moment, the comparatively low cost of a nature film—even a feature nature film—allowed this new Disney product to be a financial success. While *Bambi* cost $2 million, and lost $1 million during its first run, *The Vanishing Desert* cost around $350,000, and grossed $4 million.[12]

Furthermore, the True-Life Adventure films were, like the animations, durable: neither the animations nor the nature films aged as quickly as most live-action films tend to. Over the decades, the Disney animated features have done quite well and continue to be successful in re-release. While the nature films fell prey to changing science and an evolving social awareness (the opening narration of *The Vanishing Prairie,* for example, is patronizing to Native America in ways that have come to seem quite problematic), they too endured to become popular television entertainment during the years when Disney was a major force in television programming. The True-Life Adventures were also inevitable parts of school libraries across the country during the decades when school districts routinely bought 16mm prints of educational films. Several of the feature-length True-Life Adventures can still be found in video rental outlets.

The popularity of the Disney films was the result of their combination of first-rate nature photography with forms of narrative entertainment developed by the Disney Studio during the decades that preceded the release of *Seal Island*. True, Disney nature photographers were sent into the field without a script and were supposed to capture the most interesting imagery they could find, and ideally, according to James Algar, "those unexpected and unpredictable happenings that cannot possibly be written into a story ahead of time."[13] But Disney made sure that the films that developed out of this cinematic research were as carefully constructed and entertainment-driven as any film produced by a Hollywood studio. While the Disney nature films may have seemed to their first audiences as devoid of politics or ideology as the early Silly Symphony cartoons, these films promoted not only particular attitudes toward family life and gender, but a deep complacency about the history of Manifest Destiny and modern middle-class life. Indeed, for all their charm and beauty, the True-Life Adventures can seem as ideologically motivated as *Animal Farm* to a contemporary viewer.

In *The Vanishing Prairie,* as in so many Disney films, the focus is on the nuclear family, especially on the bond between mothers and children and on moments within the lives of animals that seem to mirror middle-class American mores (and in one way or another confirm the gender politics of the time). The film begins with birds migrating—beautiful shots that retrospectively seem like premonitions of *Fly Away Home* (Carroll Ballard, 1996) and *Winged Migration* (Jacques Perrin, 2002). It then moves through various avian courtship rituals and focuses on an amusing moment in the domestic life of a pair of grebes: a piebilled grebe father looks after grebe eggs while the mother grebe is searching for food for several chicks. He does not see that one of the eggs has gotten caught in his feathers and inadvertently moves it out of the nest when he steps out. The narrator comments, "Like most males, he's rather careless about domestic chores!" and then mouths the thoughts of the mother grebe when she returns: "Well, that's typical! Perhaps if he had to *lay* these eggs, he'd be more careful. I declare, these husbands—always leaving things for someone else to pick up!" The fact that the male grebe is tending to the children and the female grebe is out looking for food runs counter to white middle-class gender roles in the 1950s, but the possible impact of this moment is quickly suppressed in favor of humorous banter that locates the grebes within conventional family patterns.[14]

A sequence of amusing mating rituals among grouse leads to a passage on buffalo, punctuated by the birth of a buffalo calf, the mother's care of the calf, and the calf's first attempts to nurse. Then it's on to a passage on prong-horned antelope and big-horned sheep; then to a long segment about a mother mountain lion caring for and training her cubs; then to a complex

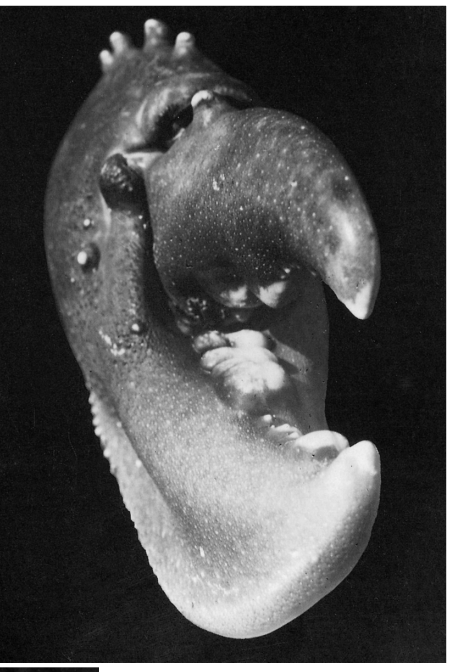
passage focusing primarily on a community of prairie dogs and their amusing attempts to deal with interlopers (including a mother coyote searching for food for her pups and a male badger who meets a female and falls in love). The climax of *The Vanishing Prairie* is a sequence that begins with buffalo in mating season (no actual mating is shown), followed by a lightning storm that starts a prairie fire, which is put out by heavy rain and a flood. The well-known and much-imitated finale takes us to mountains in winter, where male bighorned sheep battle to the music of "The Anvil Chorus." The film concludes with the narrator's assurance that "Nature preserves her own and teaches them how to cope with time and the unaccountable ways of man. Mankind, in turn, beginning to understand Nature's pattern, is helping her to replenish and rebuild so that the vanishing pageant of the past may become the enduring pageant of the future."

It is, of course, a pageant that Disney provides in *The Vanishing Prairie, The Living Desert,* and in the other True-Life Adventure films. In the completed films, we are sutured into the Disney vision by the continual presence of the narrator; by the music, which is carefully and continuously synched with the action so as to create particular, interpretive cinematic moods; and by the film's visual and textual framing of the "adventures" of the animals. Not only do these films create animal characters that are meant to lure children, mothers, and fathers into emotional identification in much the same way as Disney's animated features do, but individual sequences are often fabricated to suggest that the animals, like the spectators in the theater, are interested observers of what is occurring onscreen. In *The Living Desert* an owl "watches" a burrowing snake, a courtship ritual of tarantulas, and a scorpion mating dance. And, when ground squirrel "Skinny," the "kid from across the way," confronts a Gila monster and chases it away by kicking sand in its eyes, the heroic exploits of the little guy are watched and admired by the neighborhood ground squirrels, who realize they have underestimated Skinny (at the end of the sequence, Skinny rides off into the sunset on the back of a desert tortoise). In other words, in these films—as in any other Hollywood melodrama—we enjoy the pleasure of gazing at the private lives of characters we can identify with, and we share the characters' gazes at each other.

Originally, the True-Life Adventures provided a new, exotic form of entertainment (after half a century, at least judging from a recent class on the history of documentary I taught at Bard College, the entertainment value of *The Living Desert* is still considerable for film students); they combined the conventional pleasures of entertainment film with sense that the audience was learning something. Of course, the True-Life Adventures create an expanded sense of the animals that inhabit particular regions, combined with an emotional residue of pleasant nostalgia for the innocent past and an implicit acceptance of the inevitable progress of civilization. The True-Life Adventures may have created in their first audiences a greater awareness of the natural environment, but it was an awareness qualified by a deep complacency. The natural world is valuable and admirable, the Disney films suggest, precisely to the degree it can be understood to reflect and confirm the ideology of contemporary American middle-class family life.

When one comes to the Painlevé films having first experienced the Disney nature films as a formative childhood influence, it is difficult not to feel that they are transformative, at least in terms of what we assume a nature film can be. While the True-Life Adventures were instigated by financial concerns, Painlevé's nature films were an attempt to demonstrate the value of cinema for science (a highly controversial idea for French scientists of the 1920s), and to produce both good science and good cinema.[15] In a sense, the pageantry of the Disney films reflects their origins in the studio system: many of the True-Life Adventures were elaborate feature-length extravaganzas, produced within a hierarchical studio system involving many people. The Painlevé films are generally eight to 15 minutes long, and were relatively humble productions, often collaborations with Painlevé's wife, Geneviève Hamon, in which Painlevé—working with technology he himself invented for filming underwater—did his own cinematography or worked with a single cameraperson (usually either André Ramond or Eli Lotar). Like the Disney films, Painlevé's nature films were shot in 35mm and were shown in public theaters. Indeed, one of these films, *The Seahorse* (*L'Hippocampe*, 1934) was successful enough to support a spin-off: a line of seahorse jewelry designed by Hamon and displayed "in chic boutiques alongside aquariums filled with live seahorses."[16] But *The Seahorse* was the only Painlevé nature film to break even (and, unfortunately, the profits from the seahorse jewelry were stolen). Painlevé was, throughout his life, more a scientist and educator than a capitalist, and his energies were generally directed toward the promotion of science films as an educational tool.

Not surprisingly, given their production process and purpose, the scope and underlying ideology of the Painlevé nature films are very different from the Disney films. The second of Painlevé's "Ten Commandments" for filmmakers is "You will refuse to direct a film if your



Photos from the Jean Painlevé Collection, courtesy Les Documents Cinématographiques, Paris

Above: *"De Gaulle"*—or lobster's pincer, 1929 photograph

Left: Painlevé with Debrie movie camera in a waterproof box, 1934 photograph

convictions are not expressed."[17] Each Painlevé film tends to focus on a single organism, usually a single sea creature. Each film presents, clearly and concisely, the crucial moments in the life cycle of the chosen organism, often acknowledging that this particular organism might not at first seem worthy of being the focus of a film. In general, Painlevé's commitment is to the wonder and the beauty of organisms that some would consider beneath our notice (the sea urchin, for instance, or the acera, a tiny mollusk). And he is drawn to organisms, or aspects of organisms, that some would find disgusting: the South American vampire bat in *The Vampire* (*Le Vampire,* 1945), for example, and the love life of the "cephalopod, horrifying animal" in *The Love Life of the Octopus* (*Les Amours de la pieuvre,* 1965). Though the body of each film offers in-close examinations of the organisms, Painlevé often makes clear how the organism he has chosen to focus on relates to human society—in a simple practical sense. *The Vampire,* for example, begins with a brief reminder of the pervasiveness of vampires in our imaginations and in the arts—a shot from Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) is included; and *Shrimp Stories* (*Histoires des crevettes*) begins with imagery of men and women fishing for shrimp in ocean shallows.

While the True-Life Adventures tend to be live-action confirmations of attitudes and ideas evident in Disney's early animated features and cartoons, the Painlevé films can be seen, at least in part, as related to Painlevé's interest in art, particularly Surrealism. Painlevé (the son of distinguished mathematician and one-time French prime minister Paul Painlevé) studied mathematics, then medicine, then biology and zoology. In 1923, at the age of 21, he coauthored a scientific paper with one of his professors and presented it to the Académie des Sciences. In 1924, he graduated from the Sorbonne with a degree in physics, chemistry, and biology. By the time he finished university, he had become fascinated with the then-thriving French avant-garde art scene in Paris. Soon, he was friendly with a number of the Surrealists; he was one of the publishers of, and a contributor to, the single issue of the journal *Surréalisme.*[18] Painlevé also became involved with the ciné-club movement that was sweeping through France and the rest of Europe and making available a wide variety of forms of cinema not regularly screened in commercial theaters. Through ciné-club activity, he became close friends with Jean Vigo and in 1927 he finished his own short Surrealist film, *Methuselah,* which is particularly reminiscent of René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924).[19] Painlevé's engagement with Surrealism would continue; for example, he supplied the remarkable text for the narration of Georges Franju's *The Blood of the Beasts* (*Le Sang des bêtes,* 1949).

The defiance of social convention implicit in Painlevé's early movement between the worlds of science

and Surrealism is frequently evident in his nature films, especially in his (usually implicit, but clearly evident) reasons for focusing on particular organisms. While the Disney nature films focus on animals whose activities can be seen as analogous to, or sentimentally reminiscent of, the activities of the largely middle-class families who were their primary audience, Painlevé's choices often seem, at least in part, a function of the ways in which particular organisms offer a challenge to conventional societal assumptions and values. For example, in an unpublished conversation with Brigitte Berg, Painlevé makes clear that one of the reasons for his early choice of the seahorse as subject was the way the male and female seahorses collaborate on child-raising: the female lays her eggs in the male's abdominal pouch; once the eggs are fertilized, the male nourishes the eggs and, in time, gives birth to the baby seahorses. As Painlevé explained to Berg, "The seahorse was for me a splendid way of promoting the kindness and virtue of the father while at the same time underlining the necessity of the mother. In other words, I wanted to re-establish the balance between male and female."[20] Rather than using the seahorses to reconfirm conventional middle-class American family patterns, Painlevé uses his cinematic report on seahorses to do what he sees as progressive gender politics; he wants us to learn not only *about,* but *from* this strange fish.

Painlevé's interest in the acera mollusks in *Acera, or the Witches' Dance* seems to have two motivations: one of them obvious and the other more subtle. Of obvious interest is the acera's way of finding a mate; as suggested by the film's title, the acera do a kind of ballet, during which the cloaks that encircle their bodies fly open, evoking tutus. A substantial portion of the film is devoted to shots of this dance, which is fascinating and lovely—and reminiscent of moments from Oskar Fischinger films and Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). But once the acera have found mates, we learn that their means of sexual reproduction could not be further from anything implied in a Disney film: each acera is bisexual and can function sexually as either male or female, or, as is demonstrated in *Acera, or the Witches' Dance,* simultaneously as male *and* female. At one point, we see a chain of five acera in which each of the three middle partners fertilizes the eggs of another while, at the same time, having its own eggs fertilized. For Painlevé, the beauty of the acera does not depend on the way it mimics conventional Western assumptions about sexual morality. One can only imagine the repercussions this lovely film would have if it were shown in high-school biology classes in the United States today.

The Vampire, the best-known Painlevé film (at least in this country), makes its politics more specific and more overt. During the German occupation of France, Painlevé was a persona non grata for a variety of reasons (including the help he gave refugees from Fascism to obtain work visas and French citizenship), and spent those years in hiding. Soon after the German occupation of France, he escaped to Spain underwater by using the diving gear he had invented. Just before the war, Painlevé had seen, for the first time, the Brazilian vampire bat (*Desmodus rotundus*), and had begun work on what would become *The Vampire*. His interest in the creature and the film seems to have been closely related to his hatred of Nazism: the bat, which could be a scourge to its animal and human neighbors, was, like the Nazis, a "brown pest." Near the end of *The Vampire,* Painlevé reveals "the salute of the vampire": "When I was finishing the film, I noticed how the vampire bat extends its wing before going to sleep. I thought it looked like the Nazi 'Heil-Hitler' salute."[21] In this instance, the bat is used overtly as a political metaphor in a way that is not particularly characteristic of Painlevé's work—though, as usual, the film is good science.

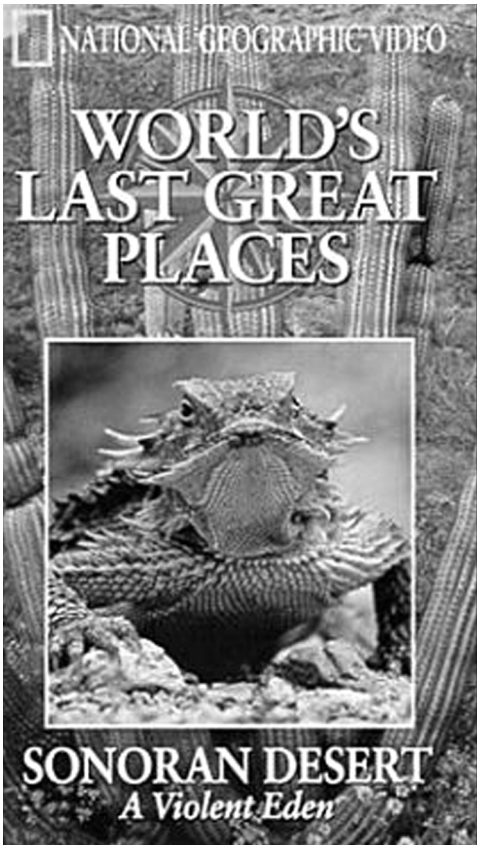
Throughout his career, Painlevé was primarily committed to the creation of first-rate science films and the development of audiences for these and other forms of cinema that might energize and inform the public. Soon after the war, he became president of the French Federation of Ciné-Clubs, and continued to promote the use of cinema as a way of popularizing science through his work with the Institute of Scientific Cinema (which he started in 1930) and by helping to found the International Association of Science Films. He was also among the first science filmmakers to work with television and, in time, would experiment with new video techniques. While for Disney the nature film was one small part in the construction of an empire, for Painlevé, filmmaking always remained a means of democratizing scientific research and of using cinema to work across theoretical and cultural distinctions to share information about our remarkably complex, sometimes terrifying, but always wondrous world.

INADVERTENT ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC'S *SONORAN DESERT, A VIOLENT EDEN* (1997)

For a number of years, I've spent time in and around the Sonoran desert near Tucson, Arizona. At first, my visits were brief—spring break escapes from central New York State winters—but in time, the visits got longer. As I write this, I am spending my fourth full winter/spring living in the desert. I've lived in three locations to the west of Tucson—two of them in the eastern foothills of the Tucson Mountains; the third, several miles west of the range, within sight of the western headquarters of the Saguaro National Park and about two miles from the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. During these stays, I've done a good bit of desert walking and, like many locals, have often made water and "quail blocks" (solid blocks of seed and grain that birds and rodents love) available to the neighboring wildlife. I've read some of the literature the Sonoran desert has inspired, I've talked with park rangers and other more permanent locals about the desert, and I have even considered buying desert land while some is still available.

I had already developed an affection for the Sonoran desert when, during one of my winters in central New York, I noticed that a National Geographic documentary, *Sonoran Desert, a Violent Eden,* was about to air on television. I watched the hour-long piece with considerable interest and found the film stunning and informative—but I came away troubled by its impact. Indeed, in the days after watching the film, I found I was questioning whether I wanted to spend the following winter in the Sonoran desert, as I had planned—a feeling that continued to hover in my near-consciousness for quite some time. This experience helped to instigate a deeper interest in nature filmmaking and has caused some revisions in my courses on the history of documentary. What is interesting to me is how a seemingly scientific film about a specific place can work on various contradictory levels, and how some of this impact may well have subtle political effects that the filmmakers may not have foreseen.

Sonoran Desert was produced and written by Sean Morris. In its video release, it is introduced as part of a series of films, "World's Last Great Places."[22] In general, it is a perfectly competent, relatively conventional nature film, beautifully photographed (by Morris and Keith Brust and a number of assistants), well edited (by Barry Nye), and contextualized by a traditional voice-of-god narrating voice (Richard Kiley). Whereas the True-Life Adventures use footage collected by first-rate wildlife photographers within a context that has at most the aura of science, the science in *Sonoran Desert*



© National Geographic

Sonoran Desert

is (so far as I have been able to determine) relatively accurate, at least in the sense that the creatures are not anthropomorphized in ways that tend to obscure the realities of the biota of which they are a part. Indeed, one naturalist at the Desert Museum told me that Sean Morris and his collaborators were able to capture events he had never seen during a lifetime of studying the desert: the horned lizard squirting a coyote with blood from a pouch in its eye socket, for example. Nevertheless, the filmic exploration of the Sonoran desert in *Sonoran Desert* is problematic.

The film opens with a visual précis, which is followed by the National Geographic identification logos. The tone is set by the title, "*a* Violent *Eden,*" and by the opening lines of the précis: "This is a stern and unforgiving land, a withering desert, tormented by the sun; only the most superbly adapted creatures can survive here and the blink of an eye can separate life from death." The words are accompanied by a sequence that begins with an image of a Gila monster, followed by shots of an antelope squirrel running and being struck by a rattlesnake; a deer sensing danger; another shot of the Gila monster; a battle between a deer mouse and a centipede; bees seemingly attacking something; and a tarantula darting out of its hole to strike a roach.

The body of the film moves the viewer roughly through a calendar year, beginning in late winter and ending after the post-monsoon renewal, "a sign of triumph and a time of celebration." After the passage of

landscape shots that follows the précis and opening credits, the film develops a rhythm: sequences focusing on particular creatures are intercut with short, time-lapsed passages of landscape/skyscape that function as transitions through time and from topic to topic. Roughly, the topics covered include snakes and Gila monsters coming out of hibernation at the end of winter, mating, and searching for food ("for their prey, the desert is a death trap"); cactus bees harvesting the blooms of prickly pear cacti, mating, providing food for their offspring, becoming exhausted and being eaten by ants, birds, and lizards; a family of thrashers protecting their nest from a king snake; nectar bats finding their way to saguaro blooms; sand scorpions becoming cannibals during the heat of midsummer and being eaten by a shovel-nosed snake; a battle between a grasshopper mouse and a ten-inch centipede (one of the "terrible monsters that are on the prowl" during summer nights); plants and animals enduring or succumbing to the brutal heat; the saguaro producing fruit; coyotes taking advantage of a weakened javelina; a horned lizard eating ants and a coyote trying to kill the lizard; a late-summer lightning storm causing a fire; monsoon rains creating flooded washes and ponds in which spade-foot toads live, breed, and die; and the desert covered with poppies after the rains.

As may be evident from this description, *Sonoran Desert* focuses primarily on the desert creatures' struggle to find food and to mate—basically the same topics emphasized in the Painlevé films and the Disney True-Life Adventures. In some ways, the National Geographic film is more like the Disney films than the Painlevé films: for instance, it pretends to cover an entire region, rather than a single species. But like the Painlevés, it is more candid about what the creatures actually do. Indeed, *Sonoran Desert* focuses on what Disney tends to suppress: open depictions of the creatures' sex acts and deaths. Early in the body of the film we see, in extreme close-up, rattlesnakes having sex, and soon after this, an expanded version of the scene in the précis during which an antelope squirrel runs from a Gila monster only to be struck and swallowed by a rattler. Then, we see a Gila monster eating the eggs of a gambel's quail, followed by the babies of a white-footed deer mouse. Almost as a response to the Disney tendency to romanticize and suburbanize animals, the narrator explains that "the white-footed deer mouse is a diligent, successful mother" for her week-old "pink babies," just before the Gila monster arrives to eat them. In general, whereas the Painlevé films are brief, witty, poetic science lectures and the Disney True-Life Adventures work as somewhat slapstick comedies, *Sonoran Desert* is an action-adventure drama that exudes something of the aura of the early "bring 'em back alive" films.

While all of the events depicted certainly do occur, *Sonoran Desert,* like any typical action-adventure film, tends to condense the activities depicted into what becomes an extravaganza of the violent and the bizarre; basically it constructs a fiction from non-fictional elements.[23] Indeed, the assumption at the heart of the film seems to be that it is precisely the unending series of violent events revealed in the film that renders the Sonoran desert distinctive, one of the "Last Great Places." But all natural environments are full of predators of one kind or another; predatory "violence" is no more frequent in the Sonoran desert than in a lake in the Catskills or on a Wisconsin dairy farm. Creatures prey on other creatures everywhere and they do it in ways that, if we saw them in the kinds of close-ups cinema can provide, might seem as impressive as what one sees in *Sonoran Desert.*

Furthermore, the moment one walks into the Sonoran desert one experiences a radically different sense of the place than what the film suggests. *Sonoran Desert* excludes much of what might cause a viewer to feel the serene beauty of this environment, where bird life seems to dominate (it is a favorite haunt for birders) and the animals most in evidence are the cottontail rabbit (not represented in the film) and other, smaller rodents. It is true that the Sonoran desert is home to several poisonous species—several kinds of rattlesnakes, the bark scorpion, and the Gila monster—but the actual danger of these creatures has always been exaggerated by conventional cinematic depictions of the region, and it is exaggerated here. According to a local Tucson hiking guide, the overwhelming majority of rattlesnake bites are "incurred while someone [often someone under the influence of alcohol], usually a fifteen-to-twenty-five-year-old male, is playing with the snake"; no human deaths from scorpion bites have occurred in 30 years; and to get bitten by the rarely seen Gila monster, "you would practically have to fall near one and surprise it."[24] The biggest danger in the Sonoran desert is probably skin cancer. Indeed, Craig Ivanyi, a curator at the Desert Museum, took particular umbrage at the film's implication that the Gila monster was an aggressive, dangerous creature: "The Gila monster is the gem of our desert, and if you should be so lucky as to see one, you should treasure the experience."[25]

The documentary effectiveness of *Sonoran Desert* at anything beyond somewhat sensational entertainment is particularly compromised by the film's refusal

to recognize that the human being is now the most visible species in much of the Sonoran desert (and, of course, has been part of this environment for centuries). The only indication in the film that the relatively recent arrival of millions of human beings may have had an environmental impact on the region is the narrator's mention, over footage of the desert wildfire created by the lightning storm, that "wildfires are new to the Sonoran. Plants introduced by man are what make the brush dense enough to burn." The film's remarkable erasure of human settlement from the Sonoran desert, while not unusual for a nature film, is a convenient way of avoiding the fact that this "Last Great Place," this "Eden," is, for all the symbiosis of its flora and fauna, endangered.[26] In other words, the film provides a way of entertaining an audience in part by creating a sense that the audience is learning about reality, while at the same time enforcing the audience's complacency about the fragility of the environment depicted.

All in all, the effect of *Sonoran Desert* is somewhat similar to the impact of "If it bleeds, it leads" news shows. If one watches this kind of news coverage long enough, one can hardly fail to become frightened. I'm sure that the makers of *Sonoran Desert* found the desert beautiful and fascinating—why else would they devote so much time and energy to making the film?—but their depiction seems more likely to alienate their audience from the desert than to engender respect for it. And this alienation is particularly problematic given the fact that the southern Arizona climate continues to attract new residents at record-setting rates. If these newcomers arrive with deep-seated fears about the natural environment of the region, they are all the more likely to be drawn to forms of residential development that eliminate direct experience of the desert, and they are far less likely to see what remains of the desert as worth protecting. The Sonoran desert may be one of the "Last Great Places," but the film inadvertently suggests that, given the level of grotesqueness of what goes on there, maybe it's just as well that it *is* disappearing in the face of suburban development.[27] For all practical purposes, *Sonoran Desert, a Violent Eden* transforms one of the world's most remarkable environments into a problem to be overcome by modern consumer society.[28]

THE NATURAL WORLD AS PARALLEL UNIVERSE: *A DIVIDED WORLD* (1948) AND *MICROCOSMOS* (1996)

One of the problems with the failure of academic film studies to seriously explore the nature film is that even landmarks in the genre have gotten lost, sometimes in instances when such a loss was easily avoidable. A particularly good example is Swedish director Arne Sucksdorff's remarkable short, *A Divided World*. During the postwar explosion of the film society movement in the United States, the Sucksdorff film was celebrated. It was shown at Cinema 16, accompanied by program notes written by distinguished critic Arthur Knight. During the following decades, when libraries were buying 16mm films, many acquired *A Divided World*. In recent years, however, as many academics have abandoned 16mm, these collections have been disbanded, and many of what were considered film classics a generation ago are no longer available to audiences. This seems particularly the case with nature films, including *A Divided World,* which is no longer in distribution in the United States.[29]

A Divided World begins with an organist playing a Bach fantasia as we see shots of a marsh and a snowy forest lit by a full moon. A small church, cemetery, and several houses in a small village are visible; then the camera slowly moves back into the snow-covered forest, where we see the eyes of a distant owl. The music becomes subdued and the night cries of animals and birds become audible. A tiny white weasel is eating the carcass of a bird, but runs and hides from a fox that eats what remains. A white rabbit is seen running through the woods (the church is seen in the distance at one point) as wind blows through the trees, making eerie shadows on the snow. The eyes of the owl are again seen in the distance. The owl then flies across the woods and confronts the fox, which has apparently killed the rabbit. While the weasel watches, staying carefully out of reach, the owl and fox battle over the carcass. The owl flies off with the carcass, and the fox is seen nursing an injured paw. At the end of the film, Arthur Knight suggested in his program notes, "when the camera turns back to the snug little house on the edge of the forest, civilization takes on new meanings. The music of Bach suggests the sublimation of primitive instincts through art and man's creation."[30]

Much of the impact of *A Divided World* comes from Sucksdorff's recognition that the two parts of our "divided world" are in very close proximity, that indeed they exist in virtually the same place and time. In *A Divided World,* one world is visually the background of the other and vice versa, and the Bach fantasia and the

sounds of nature interweave throughout the film. While the action in *A Divided World* is reminiscent of both *Sonoran Desert* and of the Disney True-Life Adventures—like *Sonoran Desert,* Sucksdorff's film focuses on a series of predatory encounters between animals, and as in *The Vanishing Prairie* and *The Living Desert,* humor is added by the presence of the tiny white mink—the impact of the film is very different from these other films, in large part because of Sucksdorff's way of combining reality and fantasy.

It is a fundamental trope of the nature film that long shots of real landscapes are used to cover up the fact that the close shots of animal or insect life are fabricated within carefully controlled environments.[31] While the kinds of events we see are certainly part of the real existence of the creatures depicted, the particular depictions are constructed, either by setting up a situation that would be impractical to wait for (when a giant saguaro falls in *Sonoran Desert,* we recognize that while such an event is inevitable for every saguaro, this one was toppled specifically for the film), or by creatively editing events (the rattler striking the antelope squirrel at the beginning of *Sonoran Desert* was clearly constructed in the editing). Both methods are used in *A Divided World.*

However, while the animals and actions in *A Divided World* are clearly real—and, as in most nature films, are made reasonably convincing through the careful control of mini-environments and creative editing—the scintillating, gorgeously lit long shots of farm and woods *and* the close-ups of the animals (all of which are beautiful specimens, seemingly unmarked by life in the wild) create an aura of fantasy. As a result, the film seems more a parable than an exercise in stark realism. The houses and church appear to be models. No people are ever visible, though smoke is coming out of the chimney during the final shot of the farmhouse. This is a fairy-tale town. Ultimately, the two levels of Sucksdorff's divided world re-contextualize each other, each making the other seem less solid, less complete, less "real." The ambiguity of the film is confirmed by what is perhaps the most obvious deviation from the conventional nature film in *A Divided World*: Sucksdorff's refusal of direct commentary or explanation. There is neither text nor narration, and the result is a sense that both human nature and nonhuman nature are beautiful and powerful mysteries.

A related approach is evident in the remarkable French feature *Microcosmos, Le peuple de l'herbe* (*The People of the Grass*), by Claude Nuridsany and Marie Pérennou. In making *Microcosmos,* Nuridsany and Pérennou were at great pains to combine science and art as a means of avoiding some of the implications of more conventional nature films. According to Pérennou, "We try to engage the imagination of the spectator. We tell the story of this world as if it were an opera, not simple biology. We are right in the middle of art and science; we put these two fields together—people have a tendency to separate them."[32] As is true in *A Divided World* (and in some of the Painlevé films as well), in *Microcosmos* the focus is not on a distant, exotic, vanishing "Last Great Place," but on dimensions of the everyday world we normally ignore: in this case the life of insects in a meadow during the summer.[33] Like Sucksdorff, Nuridsany and Pérennou do not pretend to explain what they show us, but rather, confront us with the essential mystery, beauty, and wonder of our natural surroundings.

While the overall organization of *Microcosmos* is similar to the organization of *Sonoran Desert*—each begins with a précis and some general commentary, followed by the body of the film, during which we move back and forth between long shots of the general environment and close-ups of the lives unfolding within this environment—the two films could hardly be more different in tone and impact. The narration in *Sonoran Desert* is virtually continuous (in this, the film is typical of the nature films I've seen), and is meant simultaneously to explain what we are seeing *and* to communicate the filmmakers' sense of the Sonoran desert as a violent and dangerous, while sometimes beautiful, place. On the other hand, *Microcosmos* uses only two brief passages of narration during its 80 minutes (both spoken by Kristin Scott Thomas). Each is an attempt to promote a mood unusual for a film with a scientific bent.

During the précis, we move from airplane shots of cloudscapes down to a helicopter shot of a meadow and then *into* the meadow grass via microscopic cinematography that makes the grass stems look like tree trunks. We hear the first of the two passages of narration, read as if they were poetry:

> A meadow in early morning, somewhere on earth.
> Hidden here is a world as vast as our own,
> Where the weeds are impenetrable jungles,
> The stones are mountains,
> And even the smallest pond becomes an ocean.
> Time passes differently here.
> An hour is like a day;
> A day is like a season;
> And the passing of a season is a lifetime.
> But to observe this world, we must fall silent now
> and listen to its murmurs.

Microcosmos: the deep significance of the mundane

Courtesy of Spirit of Baraka Website

And the filmmakers do fall silent, until nearly the end of the film.

Nuridsany and Pérennou's decision to back away from words and to allow what they show us to speak for itself reflects their confidence in both their subject matter and their cinematic skills in communicating what they feel about the world they are depicting. And it reveals a very different attitude toward the natural world from that which characterizes *Sonoran Desert*. For Nuridsany and Pérennou, the natural world is an awesome—not fearful—place. As Pérennou explains, "Insects are so often portrayed as little robots who are always killing each other, like [in] science fiction movies. To us they are like mythological creatures, creatures of great beauty."[34] This attitude is evident in the choices of both narrator and narration. Scott Thomas's soft-spoken voice is a far cry from the usual authoritative male voice-of-god narrator, as is the language of the brief bits of narration, which are poetically evocative rather than, as in *Sonoran Desert,* blunt and definitive.

Of course, in *Microcosmos,* as in most nature films, music and sound effects function as indirect forms of narration. In general, Nuridsany and Pérennou use various combinations of sound effects (including what I presume are insect sounds recorded and played back at various speeds) with one of several forms of music (the sound design of the film is by Laurent Quaglio; the original music by Bruno Coulais). At times, it is not entirely clear whether a sound *is* a sound effect or a musical imitation of insect sounds; at others, imagery is accompanied by orchestral, sometimes operatic music. The mood created by the sound effects and music depends on the particular subject matter, but the filmmakers are at great pains to avoid using music that might confirm conventional clichés about insects being creepy and dirty.

Microcosmos offers a considerable variety of insect life encountered during a typical summer day, which begins with early morning and ends, after an evening rainstorm, with night.[35] Imagery of insects (and in one instance, a pheasant) grounded in 15 years of research and three years of shooting (in some cases with equipment designed by the filmmakers) is presented at appropriate moments during the daily cycle. It is, of course, one of the inherent properties of theatrical cinema that the combination of camera and projector magnifies whatever is shot, and in this particular instance, cinematic magnification powerfully amplifies the stunning micro-photography by Nuridsany, Pérennou, Hugues Ryffel, and Thierry Machado. What is most notable about *Microcosmos,* however, is that the directors chose to focus not on exotic creatures we are relatively unacquainted with, but on astonishing traits of common insects, many of which are usually considered as pests.

One of the early sequences in the film follows a ladybug crawling on a stem where ants are tending to a colony of aphids. The ants repel the ladybug, which goes on its way, and we watch as the ants harvest the honeydew the aphids are producing.[36] The clarity of this imagery needs no narration, allowing us to confront the astonishing spectacle of one insect species domesticating another, protecting it, and caring tenderly for it. In another of the film's most remarkable sequences, two snails are apparently having sex. They are filmed in gorgeous, extended, glistening visuals that are accompanied by operatic music. The visual beauty and the operatic track seem perfectly matched. The film's

final sequence powerfully confirms the filmmakers' tendency to invest the mundane with deep significance: after the second passage of narration, an insect—most viewers, I would guess, are not clear at first what insect this might be—emerges from water and undergoes several astonishing and beautiful transformations to the accompaniment of orchestral music. At the climax of the passage, we realize that the amazing process we've witnessed was the growth of a common mosquito.

While visual beauty is an aspect of many nature films (the True-Life Adventures are full of beautiful shots, and the long vistas of the Sonoran desert in *Sonoran Desert* are gorgeous), in *Microcosmos* the filmmakers are at considerable pains to confirm their respect for the insect world by consistently creating lovely visual compositions and using a sumptuous palette of color. But often it is the mythical dimension of "the people of the grass" that seems to determine the directors' decision to include the images they choose. The sequence of a dung beetle pushing its ball along the ground, only to have it get stuck on a thorn, and then struggling to free the ball until it can once again continue on its way is positively Sisyphusian; the pheasant that attacks the ant colony, seen sometimes from inside the anthill, is reminiscent of many mythological giants from the Cyclops to King Kong; and the emergence of the mosquito at the end of the film evokes, as Pérennou has indicated, the mythological Venus, "rising out of the water."[37] Indeed, it is this mythological character of the world of insect life that justifies the loving attention the filmmakers dedicated to the film. Like some of Painlevé's films, *Microcosmos* is as much interested in what we can learn *from* the activities that take place in its "underworld" as it is in what we can learn *about* them.

The implication of the National Geographic series title "Last Great Places" is that the subjects of these films are among the few remaining "edenic" wilderness environments on earth—"edenic" meaning, apparently, not interfered with by humanity. And yet, to maintain what is essentially a fantasy, director Sean Morris needs to go to great lengths to hide the human presence in the Sonoran desert (some of *Sonoran Desert* is shot on the grounds of the Desert Museum, now Arizona's second biggest tourist attraction, drawing nearly half a million visitors each year). Nuridsany and Pérennou, on the other hand, do not participate in the kind of romantic fantasy promoted by Morris and National Geographic. They are interested in using cinema to rediscover the complexity of the real life that surrounds us, to alert us to an astonishing world, "Beyond anything we could imagine/And yet almost beneath our notice," as they explain in the narration that leads into the final sequence of *Microcosmos*. The life forms they reveal to us have clearly adapted to life as successfully as we have, and precisely in a "neighborhood" they share with human beings. The message here is not one of fear and disgust, but one of empathy, respect, and appreciation.

One context for thinking about the two very different attitudes reflected in the films discussed in this essay is postcolonial theory. The Disney films and *Sonoran Desert* are similar in their refusal to allow the creatures they depict anything like their own voice. In both, narration and interpretive music are relentless. That is, in these films the creatures are treated like colonial subjects—subjects that are fully understood by the experts who have come to record them and whose exotic lives can and must be explained to the viewer. Further, the creatures are understood within a set of stereotypes supplied by those who have come to document their lives: the filmic interpretations of many of the actions of the animals and insects in the Disney films are clearly projections of stereotypical middle-class American family experiences, and many of the events in *Sonoran Desert* reflect conventional stereotypes of the violence and brutality of the exotic animal and insect life depicted.

One final conjecture . . . In her video *The Head of a Pin* (2004), independent film/videomaker Su Friedrich intercuts between wide shots documenting a vacation near the Delaware River in northern New Jersey (Friedrich and several others are staying in a small cabin and walk to the river to enjoy swimming and picnicking) and in-close shots of a spider subduing and wrapping a wasp that has gotten caught in its web.[38] During the shots of the spider and mayfly, the vacationers discuss the strange, grisly spectacle. At one point, they admit to each other that "what we know about Nature" would fit "on the head of a pin." Near the end of the video, the final in-close shot of the spider and the now entangled wasp concludes when the camera pulls back and up, revealing that this tiny saga of predation has been occurring underneath the kitchen table in the cabin. As in *A Divided World,* we see that what can seem to be two different worlds are simply two aspects of the same space; but whereas Sucksdorff emphasizes the differences between two mysterious realms, Friedrich's concluding gesture suggests that there is a relationship between what happens below the table and what occurs on top of it: both spiders and humans live by means of the periodic exploitation of other life forms. Intelligence lies in recognizing the intricate relationships between what may at first seem separate worlds.

In the present context, *The Head of a Pin* can serve

© Su Friedrich

Cathy Quinlan in Su Friedrich's *The Head of a Pin*

as a metaphor for the gap that has formed between the humanities and the sciences in the current American academic environment. While educators generally recognize that anything like a sensible liberal arts education requires experiences with both the sciences and the humanities, the tendency for many faculty and students is to see one of these areas as primary and the other as, for all practical purposes, a strange, hidden world. This gap has produced one of the more remarkable paradoxes of modern intellectual life: the seemingly contradictory nature of recent conclusions/discoveries in the humanities and in the sciences.

The major conclusion of many scholars working across the humanities during recent decades has been that the categories that earlier generations assumed were biological givens—gender, race, sexual preference, even individual identity itself—are in fact social constructions. Our ways of understanding the world around us and of coming to terms with one another are not biologically intrinsic to us—not *essential* dimensions of us—but rather the social fabrications of postmodern capitalism. On the other hand, one of the most remarkable conclusions of many scholars working in the sciences during recent decades is that our DNA charts our physical being from the moment of conception. This DNA mapping is so distinct for each of us that anyone with the right tools to read it can distinguish each human individual from every other, and various classes of humans from each other, on the basis of even the tiniest molecule of the human body, living or dead. In other words, however much our socialization constructs predictable, conventional, often problematic patterns of action and thought, there *is* an essential identity within each of us.

Of course, I recognize that I am oversimplifying very complex issues, but I cannot help but wonder whether the tendency on the part of the first generation of academic film teachers and scholars to ignore the history of cinema devoted to scientific exploration and explanation might be, at least in part, a reflection of a repressed fear of confronting those dimensions of the physical world around us that might frustrate our desire for an unambiguous, stable political consciousness, and for definitive theoretical solutions to complex social questions. Obviously, the humanities and the sciences need each other more than they sometimes realize, and the wide world of cinema, including the long history of films devoted to depictions of the natural world, remains one of those dimensions of culture that may yet help us come to terms with this interdependence.

In any case, I hope it is evident that bringing nature film—and science film in general—into the mainstream of film-historical thinking and teaching has a variety of potential benefits. Most obviously, of course, it will help us become more aware of the full range of cinematic accomplishments. Certainly the best nature films—of course, we will need to define what "best" means in this genre—should be recognized alongside the best dramatic narratives, the best animations, the best avant-garde films, the best films of any kind. And we can learn from, and enjoy, the ongoing evolution of this genre. Just as the modern histories of the horror genre and film noir can help us think about the developing power of women to deal with their social

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March of the Penguins: family matters

marginalization, the evolution of the nature film can help us think about our relationship to other species and to the environment we all share. And perhaps, as suggested above, it can help us consider the complex, puzzling relationship between our biological nature and our psychological/sociological development.

At its best, the evolution of the nature film—and here there can be no better example than *March of the Penguins* (2005)—reveals an astonishing level of filmmaking courage and persistence, a commitment to species other than homo sapiens, and an interest in ways of living other than ours that may have things to teach us. Luc Jacquet's feature has received generally grudging accolades from serious film critics, many of whom are understandably put off by the film's overuse of sentimental music and narration—and perhaps by its Disney-like marketing in the U.S., where the film was touted as *the* family film of the summer. Of course, *March* indeed *is* a family film, but ultimately more in the Painlevé sense than in the Disney sense: once the emperor penguins mate, they are monogamous, and focus on producing an egg and raising a chick—but this union lasts only for one year; for nearly every emperor penguin, each year brings a new monogamous relationship. The advertising for the film, and many of the critiques of it, also ignores the film's implicit environmentalist politics. *March* creates considerable empathy for one of many forms of life placed in danger by global warming (the film's official Website—http://wip.warnerbros.com/marchofthepenguins/—makes the danger of global warming to emperor penguins explicit).

My guess is that neither the reticent critics nor the sentimental advertising campaign entirely obscure what I expect is evident to most viewers—especially those who watch the film's final credits. For most of *March of the Penguins,* the filmmakers are resolutely invisible, entirely in the service of the emperor penguins and the viewers who will see the finished film. But during the final credits, we see imagery of the filmmakers and their utterly unimposing equipment and realize that, like these penguins, the filmmakers have created something fascinating and memorable with very humble means.[39] It's a realization that has any number of ideological implications.

NOTES

1. Amos Vogel on programming science films, in Scott MacDonald, "An Interview with Amos Vogel," *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002), 49.
2. In this particular context, I prefer "nature film" to "wildlife film" because "wildlife film" has come to refer primarily to films about relatively large, terrestrial animals, whereas "nature film" more comfortably includes the lives of insects and sea organisms, as well.
3. There is also Oliver Gaycken's "'A Drama Unites Them in a Fight to the Death': Some Remarks on the Flourishing of a Cinema of Scientific Vernacularization in France, 1909-1914," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television,* vol. 22, no. 3 (August 2002): 353-74. Gaycken's discussion of early French scientific films produced by the Éclair, Pathé, and Gaumont studios, especially the Éclair series called "Scientia," is very useful. Gaycken discusses the distinction between films made in the service of scientific experimentation and films of "scientific vernacularization": that is, films that attempted to make scientific investigations and ideas available to a more general audience; and he examines a number of films involving insects and animals doing battle with one another in ways that are early instances of some of the trends discussed in this essay.
4. Lewis Jacobs' seminal anthology *The Documentary Tradition: From* Nanook *to* Woodstock (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971) includes Arthur Knight's brief discussion of Arne Sucksdorff, "Sweden's Arne Sucksdorff," which mentions *Struggle for Survival* (1944), Sucksdorff's study of bird life on a Baltic Island; and Bosley Crowther's review, "Cousteau's *The Silent World* (1956)." Erik Barnouw's *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) devotes a single paragraph to the nature film (210-12), in which the early Disney True-Life Adventures and Jacques-Yves Cousteau's film work are mentioned. But none of the recent anthologies focusing on documentary so much as mentions this dimension of documentary history.

   Derek Bousé's first chapter includes an extensive consideration of the ways in which wildlife films correspond and fail to correspond to conventional understandings of documentary. In general, Bousé sees the wildlife film as a genre separate from what we usually call documentary. See Derek Bousé, *Wildlife Films* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000). I, however, consider the films I discuss here documentaries; for me, Jean Painlevé's definition has been particularly useful: a documentary is "any film that documents real phenomena or their honest and justified reconstruction in order to consciously increase human knowledge through rational or emotional means and to expose problems and offer solutions from an economic, social, or cultural point of view." Painlevé, in "Castration du documentaire," *Cahiers du cinéma* (March 1951); reprinted in Andy Masaki Bellows, et al., eds., *Science Is Fiction: The Films of Jean Painlevé* (San Francisco, CA: Brico Press, 2000), 39.
5. Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 85.
6. I'm sure Nichols would agree that the films I discuss in this essay *are* more fully documentary than the strictly scientific use of cinema to collect data, which is his focus in the lines I've quoted. Nevertheless, the position he enunciates does, I think, confirm the broad tendency not to take the nature film seriously *as cinema.* If I have stretched Nichols' position beyond what is fair, I apologize to him.
7. Both Gregg Mitman and Bousé focus primarily on American wildlife films, and both tend to exclude films that focus on insects and sea organisms.
8. Gaycken, 368.
9. Mitman provides a useful overview of the evolution of the "bring 'em back alive film" in *Reel Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), chapters 2 and 3.
10. The nature film was also an early staple of the ciné-club movement that swept Europe and the United Kingdom in the 1920s and 1930s. For example, at its third public presentation, December 20, 1925, the London Film Society began the "*Film Society* Bionomica Series" focusing on animal and insect life. Throughout the Film Society's 14-year run, nature films were regularly part of diverse programs that also included avant-garde works, revived classics, instructional films, animations, documentaries of all sorts, and narrative entertainments from around the world. See the London Film Society's *The Film Society Programs, 1925-1939* (New York: Arno Press, 1972).
11. Dorsky, in Scott MacDonald, "Sacred Speed: An Interview with Nathaniel Dorsky," *Film Quarterly,* vol. 54, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 2-11. Dorsky's *Hours for Jerome* (shot in the late 1960s and edited in 1982) seems particularly indebted to the True-Life Adventures. Dorsky's film takes the viewer through a year spent in New York City and at a lakeside retreat in northern New Jersey. He doesn't particularly focus on wildlife but does create a sense of the seasonal cycle (as represented by weather, plant life, and human activity) as an event worth contemplating in cinema.
12. Mitman, 111-14.
13. Algar, in an interview with Gregg Mitman, in Mitman, 119.
14. Bousé suggests that wildlife films may "entail an ever greater potential [than Hollywood features] for naturalizing ideological values—for example, by 'finding' in nature the predominance of the nuclear family, or the values of hard work, industry, and deferred gratification. Indeed, because wildlife films are about nature, there may be an ever greater commitment than in Hollywood films to making things appear natural" (Bousé, 18).
15. Brigitte Berg explains that when Painlevé's early research film, *The Stickleback's Egg: From Fertilization to Hatching* (*L'Oeuf d'épinoche: De la fecundation à l'éclosion*, 1927), was screened for scientists at the Académie des Sciences in 1928, it was met with skepticism and outrage: "One scientist, infuriated, stormed out, declaring: 'Cinema is not to be taken seriously!'" Brigitte Berg, "Contradictory Forces: Jean Painlevé, 1902-1989," in Bellows, 17.
16. Berg, 25.
17. Painlevé's "Ten Commandments" were written in 1948 for a program called "Poets of the Documentary," and are reprinted in Bellows, 159. Commandment Four—"You will seek reality without aestheticism or ideological apparatus"—suggests that what Painlevé means by "convictions" in his second commandment is not *political* convictions in the contemporary sense, but convictions that develop from an exploration of natural reality from an unbiased position.
18. Painlevé's contribution to *Surréalisme* was a bit of prose that may well be coherent biology, but reads like Surrealist fantasy. The piece begins, "The plasmodium of the Myxomycetes is so sweet; the eyeless *Prorhynchus* has the dull color of the born-blind, and its proboscis stuffed with zoochlorellae solicits the

oxygen of the *Frontoniella antypyretica*; he carries his pharynx in a rosette, a locomotive requirement, horned, stupid, and not at all calcareous." The entire contribution is included in Bellows, 117.

19. Several of Painlevé's films are available on a DVD from Les Documents Cinématographiques (lesdocs.com): the title is *Jean Painlevé, Compilation no. 1* (it includes eight films: *Les Amours de la pieuvre, Oursins* (*Sea Urchins,* 1954), *Comment naissent des méduses* (*How Some Jellyfish Are Born,* 1960), *Hyas et stenorinques* (*Hyas and Stenorhynchus,* 1929), *L'Hippocampe, Cristaux liquides* (*Liquid Crystals,* 1978), *Acéra, ou le bal des scorcières,* and *Histoires des crevettes.*
20. Berg, 23.
21. Ibid., 33.
22. Other titles include *Anarctica, The Last Wilderness*; *Arctic Kingdom, Life at the Edge*; *Baja, Mexico's Cactus Forest*; *Belize, A Tropical Kingdom*; *Everglades, Secrets of the Swamp*; *Galapagos Islands, Land of Dragons*; *Hidden Congo, Forest Primeval*; *Lake Tanganika, Jewel of the Rift*; *Namib Desert, Africa's Hostile Dunes*; *Panama Wild, Rain Forest of Life*; *Tanzania, Thorn Tree Country*.

    I don't have particular enough memories of my first viewing of *Sonoran Desert, A Violent Eden* to remember whether that viewing was identical to the one provided on the VHS tape available from National Geographic. On the VHS, it is preceded by two advertisements for other National Geographic pieces: *Nature's Fury* (1994)—the advertisement presents a series of images of relatively horrific instances of "Nature's fury")—and *The Photographers* (1996), an encomium to the people who gather images for National Geographic television films.
23. The tendency of nature films, particularly those hoping to appeal to a general audience, to focus on battles between animals and insects is evident in some of the earliest films that depict insects and animals. See Gaycken's discussion of *Le Scorpien Languedocien* (Éclair, 1912), in Gaycken, 362-70.
24. Betty Leavengood, *Tucson Hiking Guide* (Boulder, CO: Pruett, 1991), 9-11.
25. I spoke with Ivanyi on the phone on April 8, 2005.
26. On March 22, 2005, I spent an hour with Rick Brusca, Executive Program Director, and Mark A. Dimmitt, Director of Natural History, of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum outside Tucson. Both confirmed my sense of the depiction of the Sonoran desert offered by *Sonoran Desert, A Violent Eden.* Both agreed that the film was well done, and in some cases provided remarkable imagery of rarely seen desert events (some of them filmed at the Desert Museum), but found that the film's overall sense of the desert was exaggerated and, for all practical purposes, a fiction. Ivanyi responded the same way in my conversation with him.

    Despite the misleading title, *Namib Desert, Africa's Hostile Dunes,* another film in the Last Great Places series (made in 1977 by David Saxon and David Hughes, and finished as *Creatures of the Namib Desert,* but not released as part of the Last Great Places series until 1998), avoids the exaggerations and distortions of *Sonoran Desert.* Its focus, as its original title suggests, is on the adaptations of those species that live in the Namib desert, which includes, of course, some species preying on others. But this film does not exaggerate the predatory nature of the environment it depicts, and further, it does not ignore either the lovely serenity of the place or the history of human presence in this environment; we meet men and women researchers who love the Namib.
27. One might argue that the exaggeration of the violence in the Sonoran desert might have the salutary impact of keeping human beings away from one of the "Last Great Places," but this is hardly tenable, given a dimension of the real Sonoran desert that is, with one tiny exception, carefully avoided by *Sonoran Desert.* In several areas of the Sonoran desert, including the particular area that is depicted in the film, urban sprawl is a major issue. Indeed, much of the filming for *Sonoran Desert* took place within metropolitan Tucson, now one of the fastest growing urban areas in the United States. Like many of the fastest growing metropolitan areas, Tucson expansion creates a good deal of debate about water resources most obviously, but also about the destruction of the Sonoran desert environment that has instigated much of this expansion. For those who decide to settle in southern Arizona primarily because of its warm climate, dry air, and tax structure, the particular qualities of the Sonoran desert may have relatively little importance. If their consciousness of the desert is informed by the clichés of the desert's hostile wildlife, including those confirmed by *Sonoran Desert,* the idea of replacing the original desert environment with an insulated suburban space, even a walled and gated space, may be particularly attractive. While the makers of *Sonoran Desert* may not have wanted to make a pro-suburbia/urban sprawl film, the subtle impact of the film might well confirm fears of the desert and desires for protection from it.
28. An interesting comparison/contrast to *Sonoran Desert, A Violent Eden* is provided by the recent *Secrets of the Sonoran Desert* (2004). A thoroughly conventional documentary (with a voice-of-god narrator, Russell Buchanan), *Secrets* covers much the same ground as *Sonoran Desert, A Violent Eden.* It is less coherently organized and less impressively photographed than the earlier film—and sometimes confirms stereotypes included in *Sonoran Desert, A Violent Eden* (creepy music is used with reptiles, for example). But the makers place much less emphasis on violence and melodrama, instead celebrating the beauty of the Sonoran desert. They do not demonize creatures like the Gila monster; and they do not entirely ignore the presence of human beings and the fact that the growing human population in the American Southwest is having a negative impact on animal habitat and species diversity.
29. I have a decent 16mm print of *A Divided World* only because a public library in northern Minnesota gave away its collection of 16mm films. The original film is in 35mm, prints of which are sometimes available through the Swedish Film Institute in New York City (212-583-2584). Over the years I have often presented "Cinema 16 shows" at colleges, universities, and other organizations interested in film history, and the nature films that Cinema 16 audiences saw and admired have consistently been the hardest to locate.
30. Quoted in MacDonald, *Cinema 16,* 144.
31. As Gaycken explains, even in the earliest nature films, the movement from long shot of real environment to close-up of fabricated environment "is deployed in order to enhance the believability of the ethological fiction that the observations are of animals in their natural habitats." He describes a number of such instances, pointing out that match-on-action shots are the primary tool for accomplishing this illusion (364).

32. Pérennou, in an interview with Charles Wright, in www.bostonphoenix.com/archives/1996/documents/00443388htm.
33. Of course, sometimes Painlevé did choose to focus on exotic creatures—*The Vampire,* for instance—but, at least in the films I've seen, he usually chose to explore the lives of organisms that most of us would normally consider beneath our notice.
34. Pérennou interview.
35. Because narrative development, especially controllable narrative development leading to climax, is difficult to find, or even to orchestrate, in nature films, it is common for longer nature films to include either fires or dramatic rainstorms, or both—often just where a commercial dramatic feature would present its climax.
36. Aphids suck the sugars produced by plants, but cannot digest all of what they imbibe. They release some of it through their anuses in the form of liquid "honeydew" that is eaten by ants.
37. Pérennou interview.
38. I've not been able to determine whether the insect is a wasp (*Bracónidae* or *Ichneumónidae*) or a stem sawfly (*Cèphidae*). Thanks to Dr. William H. Gotwald, Jr., Professor of Biology at Utica College for his assistance in narrowing down the possibilities.
39. As yet, I've not been able to find out exactly what equipment the filmmakers used to film the penguins. I assume that the Base Scientifique Dumont d'Urville, the filmmakers' base in Anarctica, is well equipped and made their facilities available to Jacquet and his colleagues. Nevertheless, the emphasis in the imagery we see of the filmmakers during the credits is on the simplicity of their equipment. Of course, for us to be able to see the imagery and sound of the emperor penguins in local theaters, the filmmakers needed to create alliances with marketing entities that have considerable resources. But the various steps in the distribution of *March of the Penguins* should not obscure the core of the experience: the filmmaking of Jacquet and his collaborators in Anarctica. I am grateful to my Hamilton College colleague Patricia O'Neill for reminding me of how similar *March of the Penguins* is to Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North.*

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Rob White was Commissioning Editor of BFI Publishing from 1995 to 2005. His work on the BFI Film Classics books during this time was singled out in the citation of the inaugural International Film Publisher of the Year award (Udine International Conference on Film Studies, 2004). Rob has written a volume in the Film Classics series (on *The Third Man,* 2003) and published scholarly essays in *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities,* the *Oxford Literary Review,* and the *Journal of European Studies.* He writes book reviews for *The Spectator,* and has been a longtime contributor to *Sight and Sound* (and, for a time, one of its columnists). A second book, *Freud's Memory,* is due from Palgrave Macmillan next year.

Rob will take over as editor with the next issue of the journal. He will remain based in London (you can reach him at filmquarterly@googlemail.com), which will provide a great opportunity for bringing new readers—and contributors—to the journal. *FQ* has always prided itself on its range and accessibility, as well as its scholarship and rigor. We have always been inclusive: of the academy and the world outside it; of opinions theoretical, political, and personal. We have a terrific record of writing on documentary, animation, avant-garde, and independent cinema, as well as considerations of history, theory, national and international cinemas, digital media, production, and the business of the business. We have published groundbreaking pieces on, among many other topics, Asian cinemas, narrative theory, and digital imaging, and have included interviews with film- and videomakers from Hollywood to Hungary and discussions that ranged from Chuck Workman's edited clips for the Academy Awards to Martin Arnold's flicker films.

In its earliest days, *FQ* published many of the first voices raised in new approaches to the study—and celebration–of film in this country: Noël Burch, Raymond Fielding, Pauline Kael, Stanley Kauffmann, Arthur Knight, Jay Leyda, Richard Dyer MacCann, Joseph McBride, Jonas Mekas, Donald Richie, Andrew Sarris, Susan Sontag, Colin Young, and many many more. . . . The decades that followed saw equally illustrious names in the pages of the journal; new scholars and writers emerged to push the boundaries and to present their ideas here. I am proud to have worked with these more recent voices; it is thanks to their contributions that the journal has earned its remarkable reputation.

It will be a new era for *FQ* now, thanks to the arrival of board members Christine Acham and Lisa Parks and the editorship of Rob White. With the continuity provided by the longtime editorial board and the two previous editors, we will maintain the best of the old—and we will also undertake the best of the new…. Welcome, Rob!

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■ IRENE CHIEN

This Is Not a Dance

U.S. NEWS AND FAN MEDIA recently descended upon the debunking of a prevailing cultural icon: the lone video game player (chubby, pasty-faced, at home in a dark room, planted in front of the computer or television with his eyes locked on the glowing screen, totally immobile except for the furious button-punching and joystick-twisting of his fingers) was triumphantly supplanted in media accounts by pairs of teenage boys frenetically hopping in synchronized rhythm to techno music atop the lighted stage of an arcade game, in public space, while crowds gathered to gawk, cheer, and queue up so that they too could play.[1]

Sustained by on- and offline fan communities, this "arcade craze" revolved around the dance simulation game *Dance Dance Revolution,* or *DDR. Dance Dance Revolution* was officially released to U.S. arcades in 2000 and quickly became the most successful of a genre of rhythm action games called Bemani.[2] Employing specialized input devices rather than the traditional joystick-based game controller, Bemani video games turn players into performers—requiring them to dance, shake maracas, scratch DJ turntables, beat drums, and strum guitars in synchronicity with the game machine. The arcade version of *Dance Dance Revolution* works like this: as strobe lights flash and music thumps out of large, neon-lit speakers, each player follows a dance sequence, symbolized by a pattern of arrows scrolling up the game screen, by stepping on the corresponding quadrants of a raised dance platform. Scores are based on the accuracy and timing of the player's steps. The game ends if the player misses too many steps.

Dance Dance Revolution has gone through multiple versions and modes of play since its original release as an arcade game in Japan in 1998, moving between a highly visible arcade-based "dance craze" in public leisure space and a home-console game experienced in private. Far-flung renditions of *Dance Dance Revolution* include versions that are played with your fingers on a handheld mini-dance pad, ones that allow live, networked gameplay in shared virtual space, and ones that integrate a digital camera so that players can see themselves dancing onscreen. Official full releases of the game mingle with song and character upgrades, as well as a profusion of region-specific, third-party, pirated, and hacked game hardware and software.[3] Rather than each new release replacing the old in linear progression, all of the versions continue to circulate through both authorized and unauthorized global channels. Certainly,

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dominant game versions and modes of playing have emerged, and this essay will focus mainly on *DDR* games played in arcades. However, as the shift between theatrical arcade performance to decentralized home-console playing has shown, gameplay configurations are neither stable nor pure. Even the relegation of home-console gameplay to "home" is problematic, since in addition to the remote spaces that the Internet opens up to them, home consoles are also set up at community and institutional social events for public play that borrows from the performative modes of the arcade. This heterogeneous flux of interactions between bodies and spaces not only foregrounds how the video

game as an object of study is a shifting target, but also suggests that attending to this very indeterminacy of the new media object—the object in motion across what cultural theorist Brian Massumi calls a "field of emergence"[4]—might be the appropriate way to theorize all media, not just the "new."

Dance simulation games exist at the intersection of two under-theorized areas that might seem to have little to do with each other: dance and video games.[5] While dance is traditionally privileged as fundamentally embodied, video-game playing is assumed to be consummately disembodied—it is the ultimate dissolution of flesh-bound "meatware" into infinitely transmissible bits of information. Thus, on the one hand, dance scholar Johannes Birringer is able to declare that "the medium of dance is the living human body, possessing the power to convey ideas inherent in its movements,"[6] while on the other, film scholar Vivian Sobchack is able to assert that "electronic representation, by its very structure, phenomenologically diffuses the fleshly presence of the human body and the dimensions of that body's material world," arguing further that electronic presence is "so diffused as to belong to

no-body."[7] Dance is media and message condensed into the body. Video-game representations disperse and ultimately disappear the body.

In her book *Dancing Machines,* Felicia McCarren suggests that "dance offers ways of thinking both about the movement possible with machines and about machines moving themselves."[8] In this spirit, I would like to trace the body in and in front of the video game *DDR,* and the solicited and elicited online and offline game culture that surrounds it, to explore a technologically mediated experience of embodiment that unfolds through movement that is both dance and a simulation of dance. I am particularly interested in how dance enabled by the video game and its digitally composited characters allows for racial and sexual figurations that translate the assumed portability of the pixel into social configurations of imagined/desired identities. Like the expressive license furnished by temporarily becoming othered sexual and racial identities (e.g., drag and blackface), the mechanically activated, technologically interpenetrated, and bracketed-as-game body is given license to move in ways that are unavailable to it in non-mediated experiences of movement. The way that *DDR* moves you by making you move, compelling you to dance, is similar to the way film "body genres" such as horror, melodrama, comedy, and porn also inspire an externally registerable bodily performance, compelling you to scream, weep, laugh, or jerk off.[9] The rhetoric of inappropriate, hyperbolic fascination also surrounds accounts of *DDR,* whose players are described and describe themselves as "in a daze," "fanatic," "zombie-like addicts," "maniacs," and "freaks" who have lost their minds and themselves to the visceral rush of the game.[10] At the same time, this aerobic mode of video-game play has also been deployed as a wholesome antidote to traditional computer games, which have been similarly pathologized as addictive, but also

as physically and psychologically unhealthy. The assumed opposition between dance and video game, intersecting with prevailing distinctions between active/passive, passion/addiction, and embodied/disembodied, is exactly what generated the frisson of surprise captured by media accounts of *Dance Dance Revolution*'s public spectacle.

By hyperbolizing the player's physical interaction with the computer game, rhythm action games such as

Dance Dance Revolution certainly provoke a rethinking of new media critiques that cast digitality as profoundly disembodied and disembodying.[11] But rather than giving the digital back its body by drawing on the bodily agency and expressivity "essential" to dance movement, this essay aims to seek out the computational in dance as well as the corporeal in new media. I will argue that the phenomenological encounter between the human body and digital technology takes sensible shape only through subtending cultural designations of sexual, racial, and national difference that are too often sidelined in critical studies of new media. To frame my exploration of the body fastened to, moved by, and becoming a computerized motion machine, I will enlist the irrepressibly enthusiastic comments barked by *Dance Dance Revolution*'s invisible announcer. At turns commanding, derisive, and sycophantic, its remarks compose a running commentary on the player's performance during the game. The announcer's voice positions the game machine as a spectator who can "see," although the machine is actually "blind" to the dancer's movements except as they coincide with the buttons that make up the quadrants on the dance pad. Earlier versions of *DDR* consistently cast a masculine voice in the role, while the newer Xbox *Ultramix* version introduces the option of choosing male, female, both, or none.[12] Like a parodic Turing Machine performing human presence in ostentatious excess of the game play, the voice emanating from the computer game is simultaneously audience, competitor, and master of ceremonies—both giving the game machine a body and making it acousmatically unlocalizable to any particular body.

"LET ME SEE YOU MOVE!"

New media theorist Lev Manovich's critique of the traditional relationship between body and screen focuses on the immobility of the body in real life versus the mobility of the body in the fictive screen world. He posits virtual reality as a fundamental break with previous human-screen interfaces because even though it imprisons the body within an encumbering apparatus, "the spectator actually has to move in physical space in order to experience movement in virtual space."[13] *Dance Dance Revolution* also simultaneously fastens the body to a machine and requires that it move. But unlike virtual reality, *DDR* does not figure movement as an exploration of an expanding space, but as the movement-rich occupation of a predefined, restricted space vis-à-vis another intending body: the

body on screen, the body of another player, or the bodies of a spectating audience. Counter to Donna Haraway's famous statement that "Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves are frighteningly inert,"[14] *DDR* demands outright that we keep up with its disturbing liveliness.

Like Manovich's, most analyses of the immobile body before the screen focus on how the screen allows the spectator to journey through visually rendered spaces otherwise forbidden or impossible. Significantly, the example Manovich offers of a VR project that synchronizes the virtual and physical worlds at the cost of clamping down the body is the Super Cockpit applica-

tion developed by the U.S. Air Force.[15] In an essay about dance movement assisted by the low-technology instruments of crutches, cane, and prosthetic leg, Vivian Sobchack exposes the privileged relationship to space that dominant video-game modes of conquering territory and traveling over expanses presume: "I was never one to plunge into space as if it were an open and hospitable field of possible experience. . . . I tended to tiptoe or edge into unknown places (however ordinary) with a certain tentativeness born of anxiety, sometimes even of fear."[16] Dance in *DDR,* however, is movement with neither forward motion nor immersion in a boundless, exotic, external space. Rather than concentrate only on the space opened up on or through the screen, players inhabit the off-screen space around their own bodies as well. What does it mean to be "immobilized" in this sense, where your actions are restricted to the area within reach of the dance pad, but are opened up to the contingencies of jumps, gestures, and motions that pulsate between your body, the scrolling arrows, the sound waves shuddering through your organs, and the animated dancer(s) onscreen?

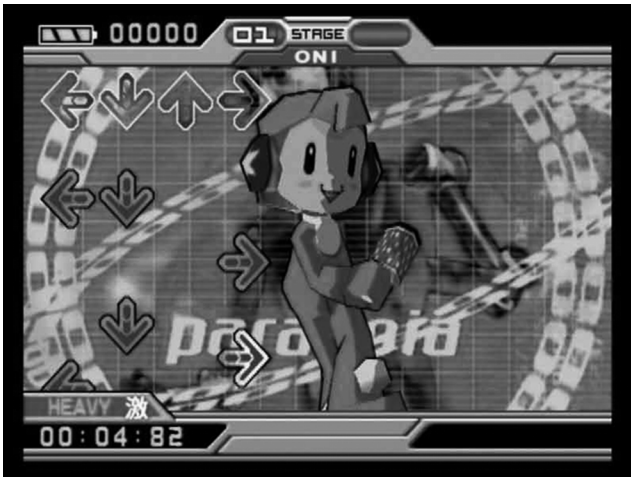
The movements of a player's body in the game inevitably exceed the requirements for touching foot to grid at the signaled time; therefore much of *DDR*'s energy is outside of the game system. The most elaborate dance flourishes of the player are imperceptible to the game itself: the dance pad records only contact or no-contact with specific quadrants at specific times. It does not register that the player has spun around, dropped his elbow to one square and then leaped up without missing a beat to continue dancing on his feet, nor that his heart is pounding and his muscles ache.[17] Rather than asserting that the dance steps that are measured by the game system are technologically mandated and thus artificial, whereas the superlative actions added by the dancers through their own interpretive movements are where the true dancing happens, I would suggest that the interplay of movement both prescribed and enabled by the game is precisely the point—or, as Brian Massumi would argue, the passage across all points.

According to Massumi, "when we think of space as 'extensive,' as being measurable, divisable, and composed of points plotting possible positions that objects may occupy, we are stopping the world in thought. We are thinking away its dynamic unity, the continuity of its movements."[18] For Massumi, position emerges from movement rather than the other way around. In other words, the arrows on the screen hitting their targets are not plotting out a series of points for the player to respond to one after another, moving from quadrant to quadrant. Rather, they are folded into and out of the continuous experience of the whole dance as moments accenting movements that flow immediately into another movement. "Never present in position, only ever in passing,"[19] the experience of playing *DDR* is not a series of isolated responses to targets on the screen. It is

instead a dynamic unity of "reciprocal variation" that encompasses the arrows hitting their targets, as if they were punctuations of a dance that you were already performing, that your body, with the help of the music, is already carrying you through, making a cause-effect relationship between your movements and the arrows impossible to isolate.

If *DDR*'s movement is not about swooping into space or about hopping from point to point, how exactly does *Dance Dance Revolution* move us? Evaluated mainly by its ability to impel people to dance, to accelerate their heartbeats and urge their bodies into motion, dance music itself might provide a clue. Music critic Simon Reynolds describes techno music in terms

of its convulsive repetition, calling it "an intransitive acceleration, an intensity without object" offering "no narrative, no destination."[20] Thinking through videogame experiences in terms of "the mechanics of motion and emotion" rather than of story, character, and architecture, Henry Jenkins writes, "Game play becomes memorable when . . . it makes you want to move . . . when the computer seems to be totally responsive . . . when the computer does something that follows logically from your actions, yet doesn't feel like it was prescripted or preprogrammed."[21] *Dance Dance Revolution* offers a space-motion empowerment fantasy that is predicated not on projecting forward to conquer visible



objects, master territory, or hit a target, but on the sensations of the body occupying the kinesphere around it. In *DDR,* action and perception are in reciprocal relation, surging and receding into each other in the same movement, creating a space that you wholly inhabit rather than one that you fly through or tour. This is not an inchoate, touchy-feely, or expressive dance, but one based on a body that is simultaneously carnal *and* abstract, that pushes the body's muscles to make sense of and fulfill the computer's mathematical predictability and precision, that is pre-programmed yet experienced as potential. The game does not force us to conform our naturally expressive bodily rhythms to the algorithms of the computer, nor does it celebrate the mechanized intensity of computer-accurate movement. Rather, it reveals to us the mathematical discipline and abstraction of our fleshly bodies in motion.

"YOU ARE A PERFECT DANCING MACHINE!"

If the player's actions in *Dance Dance Revolution* are not the directed, intentional movement of subjective expression or projection into space—if they say nothing and go nowhere—how can they be meaningful? Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests that intentionality is not just linear, purposeful movement when he affirms that "among my movements, there are some that go nowhere."[22] Dance in *DDR* stays in one place but is always in motion, like a never-ending loop. The idea of the loop is useful here, because it stands for both perpetual motion and non-progression. Although moving in space, the loop never advances forward or evolves into signification; it is suspended in an infinite hypnotic trance—immobilized, catatonic, and offering nothing but innumerable iterations of itself.

Thus the loop has both pathological and generative possibilities—the schizophrenia of continuous return and the dynamic freedom of continuous becoming. On the one hand, *DDR* is like a computerized version of the shiny red shoes in the fairy tale that force the young heroine to dance without rest—regardless of natural cycles like day and night—until she chops off her feet.[23] Even after amputation, the shoes grotesquely continue to twirl about on their own. The red shoes are a signifier that refuses stillness, an overwhelmingly vivid signifier that is set in motion by the subject, but that relentlessly reconstitutes itself, outside of any organic logic, and ultimately exceeds and annihilates her. Evacuating the subject of personal expressive agency, the red shoes no longer signify dance as meaningful expression; instead it becomes pure, inexhaustible motion.

On the other hand, Vivian Sobchack suggests that the loop is subversive because it bridges the perceived disjuncture between body and representation, literal and figural. For Sobchack, all bodies in the cinematic experience, both onscreen and offscreen, have the potential "to subvert their own fixity from within, commingling flesh and consciousness, reversing the human and technological sensorium, so that meaning, and where it is made, does not have a discrete origin in

either spectators' bodies or cinematic representation but emerges in their conjunction."[24] This cooperative meaning-making streams between bodies and images in what she calls "rebound." "The cinesthetic subject both touches and is touched by the screen—able to commute seeing to touching and back again *without a thought* . . . able to experience both here and there rather than clearly locating the site of experience as on-screen or off screen."[25] Sobchack insists that this reciprocal and reflexive sensual experience of both real and as-if-real is unique to cinema. For her, only cinema has a subjective and intentional presence that projects back to us our lived-body experience of representation,

whereas "insubstantial" digital presence "randomly disperses its being across a network, its kinetic gestures describing and lighting on the surface of the screen rather than inscribing it with bodily dimension."[26] But Sobchack underestimates the body's capacity for both abstraction and materialization in its encounter with the digital through "kinetic gestures." It is this bodily motion, reciprocally generated between player and computer, that productively expands her concept of rebound for a video game like *Dance Dance Revolution.* The corporeal form that the mimetically dancing body gives to the bits of information generated by the game program re-invests the body with a powerful modality. The dancer's active yielding to the shimmering ones and zeros entails a subjectivity-dispersing submission to abstract motion. This process is in constant oscillation with the inverse process of incarnating data into concrete spatio-temporal form.

Here, exchanges between perception and bodily movement—between symbols on the screen and the body incorporating and making sense of them—stream in a continuous circuit spurred by the vibrations of the music's beat. The player carnally translates signs into

meaning and realigns his/her body in response, already propelled by the body's movement toward the next step, indistinguishably before or after he/she makes a conscious, reflective reading of those signs, through a reversible transubstantiation of subjective feeling and objective knowledge. The concept of mimetic rebound suggests that we take literally comments made by players in which they say that getting good at *DDR* requires you to get into a "zone" where you "become" the music and thus "become" the game.

Merleau-Ponty also frames this experience of becoming in terms of acquiescing to the always incipient action-perception of music:

> We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas, precisely because they are negativity or absence circumscribed; they possess us. The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must "dash on the bow" to follow it.[27]

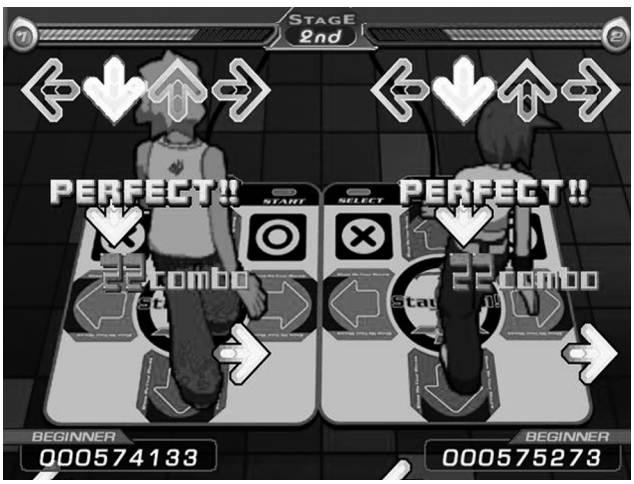
As in reading music to play a musical instrument, the experience of playing *DDR* well is not a unidirectional process where symbols on the page or screen are consciously translated into an appropriate bodily response. Rather, playing manifests the vacillating, ambivalent, nonhierarchical relationship between information and body. Although the structure of the game presupposes that the player's feet follow the arrows on the screen and that movement is determined by the sequence of arrows, the lived experience of playing makes it clear that to play the game as if parsing a list of random instructions results in inevitable failure. Players find an overall rhythm that flows across movements in a dynamic synthesis, so that each subsequent step emerges

out of the movement already started and already contains within it the accumulation of previous steps and the incipient press of all potential following steps. Some players choreograph, memorize, and perform dance sequences that use the *DDR* game as a backdrop to their virtuosic exhibition before an audience. But players who eschew the traditional expressivity of this type of "freestyle" play for the score-based precision of "tech" play also manifest the same perception-action "flow," and in fact deliberately tweak it to make the relationship between symbol and body even more arbitrarily complex. In Stealth mode, arrows disappear before aligning with their targets so that the moment the arrow passes through the target it is invisible and indeterminate, producing a temporal gap between when you see the arrow and when you are supposed to hit the step. Mirror, Left, Right, and Shuffle modes each confound sedimented patterns of exchange between body and information by reorienting the symbols so that the player is counter-intuitively required to step in a direction different from what each arrow signifies.

DDR's highly mechanized human-computer interface and the machine's relentlessly precise translation of body movement into high and low scores demands that the body conform to its ceaseless, mechanized rhythm. Sweaty, out-of-breath, and exhausted, players eventually submit to time, gravity, and the loss of energy. Handlebars provided in the arcade version are clutched as supports, and players substitute into games when another player is too tired to continue. However, the game also imagines its ideal player as a perpetual motion machine, atomizing movement into machine-logical step sequences and featuring songs accelerated to a heart-bursting maximum of 320 beats per minute.[28] Circumventing the scoring and "game over" concept, *DDR*'s Endless mode cycles repeatedly and nonstop through every song the player has unlocked until he/she is unable to play any longer and has to turn off the game to end it. The bodily struggle to become machine is rewarded with the amplification of motion and sensation, but without the strain of sustaining personal expressivity and self-identity, in what is both a material condensation and an abstract dispersal of presence into euphoric intensity.

"ARE YOU A MONKEY?"

My account of the *DDR* game experience as a feedback loop between player and game machine suggests a relationship of coherence and immersion, where the spectator exists in a physical space that is continuous with



the space onscreen. However, it is also important to think of the game-player relationship in terms of what anthropologist Michael Taussig, re-reading Walter Benjamin, calls "the mimetic faculty," where the very desire to become the (computerized) Other by copying and yielding to it is joined with the compulsion to find distance from the imitated.[29] This attraction-repulsion dynamic can be mapped to racial, sexual, and national differences modeled in the game play. To account for how technology moves us, we must consider the cultural identifications from which the computer-activated body in motion draws its affective force, as well as how these identifications are magnified or transformed in the process. Consider the fact that the first rhythm-based video game to be released in the U.S. in 1997 was *Parappa the Rappa,* in which players control a shy cartoon dog who attempts to impress a beautiful flower with the rapping skills that he learns by repeating the stylings of his teachers, including a kung-fu fighting onion and a Rastafarian frog; that the Japanese-imported arcade version of *DDR* first became immensely popular with Asian-American youth cultures in California, most visibly teenage boys; and that

the only two characters available on the *Ultramix* version are a blonde white woman named "Lady" and a black man sporting an afro named "Afro," a couple that is reiterated in the *Extreme* version's white female "Rhythm" and black male "Blues" characters. It becomes clear that the game taps into racial and sexual imaginaries that are transmuted by the ostensibly impersonal, abstract, dispersed non-presence of the computer and the player's physically mimetic connection to it. Becoming-machine is not a neutral abolition of self-identity into the blank energy of electric pulses and mechanized movement; it is articulated through pre-existing racial and sexual schemas of technology and dance that make this corporeal becoming both intelligible and irresistible.

A vital question that *Dance Dance Revolution* makes difficult to answer is "With whom are you dancing?" Most versions of *DDR* allow you to choose an animated character from a pre-programmed assortment that ranges from robots, princesses, and racialized icons like those described above, to more extravagant amalgamations such as the blue-mohawked, S&M-attired "Mr. Spanky" and the vacuum-toting, cat-eared "Maid Zukin." But is the player's relationship to the onscreen character "I am you," "I want to be you," or "I want you?" The game never makes this clear, sliding between suggesting that you are the character, soliciting you to

aspire to the character's more perfect dancing, and inviting you to desire the character through a voyeuristic gaze. The selected character dances onscreen in its own specific style as you play, ignoring the pattern of arrows superimposed over it. Its fluent dance moves are spotlighted by a floating virtual camera that ceaselessly zooms and swoops around it, competing with the arrows for your visual attention, and with your own dancing body for the spectator's attention. But the characters dance autonomously, not bound like you are to the movements dictated by the arrows and the dance grid, and irrespective of your movements. Like the disembodied commentator, the status of these mute onscreen bodies—avatar or partner, instrument or playmate, figure or ground—remains ambiguous and unstable. Embodying these various conflicting subject positions through sounds, images, and actions that do not consistently parallel each other, the game-machine body engages the player in a disorienting recursive rebound that both determines and diffuses potential subjectivities. Rave and club dancers who share a dance space pick up moves from one another, making bodily

sense of other bodies by copying and absorbing attitudes and personas through mimetic movement. What body does the *DDR* player encounter and assimilate? *Dance Dance Revolution* allows players to perform a bodily mirroring of racial and sexual otherness by submitting to an ambiguously embodied computerized Other, with all the passivity-activity, sameness-difference, proximity-distance, and incorporation-separation that this bodily mirroring entails, complicated by the arbitrarily rendered identities assumed to be made possible by the game's status not just as machine but as computer.

Marked as a Japanese import by its anime-like characters, kanji letters, and Japanese brand, character, and song names, as well as by the extra-textual fan communities that circulate Japanese popular culture imports, *DDR* is positioned in a relationship of alterity to American culture. Regardless of the game's global market, the racial figures it offers are perceived in the U.S. as coming from a Japanese imaginary removed from our own. So in the U.S., these figures become an imitation of an imitation, affording us the opportunity to simultaneously yield to the allure of the stereotypically

othered representations onscreen *and* the othered culture that created them. In other words, we do not just enjoy the pleasure of temporarily embodying the Other as represented in and by the game. We also get to embody the Other's embodiment of the Other, embodying "Japanese" embodiments of Asianness, whiteness, blackness, etc., that fascinate and repel to the extent that they mirror our own. The kinetic vertigo of recognizing both oneself and one's mimicking of others in those mimetic representations produced by an Other that one is miming is what Taussig, in his discussion of dance-focused ethnographic film, would call "mimesis of mimesis, self-reflexive mimesis, mimesis made aware

of itself as through fusion of the mimetically capacious machine with the mimetically capacious dancing body."[30] In imitating the representation-machine, we become a re-presentation of the digitalized process of representation.

To rephrase Taussig, alterity in *Dance Dance Revolution* is not a stable thing in itself, but an actively mediated relationship meeting contradictory and conflicting expectations of what constitutes racial identities. The racial homogeneity and patriarchal hegemony associated with Japanese culture allows American *DDR* players to disavow the game's racist and sexist caricatures through the racist caricaturization of the Japanese as racist, sexist, and unsophisticated about contemporary American race and gender relations. This refraction of racial imaginaries also enables us to see whiteness through the eyes of the Other, in a move that produces white masculinity itself as hyperreal fantasy. Thus the racial and sexual identity of the blond, enormously pompadoured, and blue-jeaned character Johnny is denaturalized by an over-saturation of American white male signifiers. Yet this unsettling recognition of self in other is complicated and at least partially

recuperated by the racist conception of the Japanese as derivative mimics whose attempts to imitate Western culture are comically and exotically naïve. Similarly, hybrid composites of multiple racial and sexual signifiers intermixed with nonhuman animal and robot features stress discernable identities at the same time that they make actual coherence of identity impossible. The fantastical reduction of all identity markers to an infinitely malleable, mix-and-match polygon aesthetic registers both difference *and* sameness. This is the uncontained circulation of mimesis in alterity that Taussig calls "mimetic excess": "a magnificent excessiveness over and beyond the fact that mimesis implies alterity as its flip-side. The full effect occurs when the necessary impossibility is attained, when mimesis becomes alterity."[31] However superlative, the characters onscreen are only the most obvious manifestation of the racialized and sexualized bodies imagined by *Dance Dance Revolution,* and their significance varies between players and game versions. While some *DDR* console players turn them off to focus on the arrows, others elaborately costume themselves as their favorite characters to attend anime fan conventions.[32]

At the locus of dance and technology, rave culture gathers up racialized signs, inflects them with the sexy cool of technophilia, and drops them onto African and Asian bodies, which are activated by and contained in the eroticized figure of the dancing machine. The mechanized dancer's driving energy has been historically connected to "African possession," primitivism, and "primordial energy" in an imagined linking of the mechanized and the primitive jazz body. As Felicia McCarren points out in her reading of Josephine Baker and the dancing machine, the modernist fascination with the technological paralleled the fascination with the pre-technological "primitive" or "tribal,"[33] a relationship that has been transposed to hip-hop as a

desired figure of both new urban culture and raw sexuality and savagery. Similarly, techno-orientalism casts Asianness as both technologically superior and inhumanly robotic, so that Asians are simultaneously idealized and demonized for their mysterious ability to harmonize and harness natural, cosmic forces, and for their compact, efficient bodies that are perfectly suited to the speed and rhythms of mechanical motion.[34] Thus the mimetic morphology of the player's body to the video game allows the player to embody a naturalized mastery of dance (black people have rhythm) and a technical mastery of machine movement (Asians are like robots).

The mediation of mimetically performed identities through the game machine provides players both visceral contact with the Other and appropriate distance, a dynamic that is particularly significant when examining how male arcade players play *DDR* with and against each other. Taussig reminds us that mimesis "implies both copy and substantial connection, both visual replication and palpable, material transfer."[35] Film scholar Steven Shaviro elaborates on both Taussig and Benjamin. For him, this visceral contact resonates with *contagion,* a term that aptly accommodates both the "dance fever" that overcomes *DDR*'s players and its implicit threat of homosexual infection. Shaping the body to the form of another's implies an intimate, sensuous contact that leaks one into the other. For Shaviro, "the subject is captivated and 'distracted,' made more fluid and indeterminate, in the process of sympathetic participation."[36] *DDR* creates an open-ended social space where young men can dance with other young men—imitating one another, the animated bodies onscreen, and imagined dance personas. Moving together in time and place is a powerful force for affective bonding. Yet *Dance Dance Revolution* eludes the homophobia that forbids men—particularly young Asian-American men whose virility is already in question according to dominant white masculinity—from dancing with each other in couples by displacing the eroticization of this homo-social experience to the video-game machine's sensational graphics and pulsating music. Like cinema spectators facing a movie screen, players move their bodies in unison, but they face the video-game screen rather than each other, dancing both together and apart. Eye contact with the screen rather than with the other player is key to containing the contagious reverberations between the pair's synchronously moving bodies. In his analysis of rave culture, music critic Simon Reynolds highlights the sublimation of sexuality that techno's machinic pulse affords:

> Sex as the central metaphor of dancing seems remoter than ever. Rave dancing doesn't bump and grind from the hip; it's abandoned the model of genital sexuality altogether for a kind of polymorphously perverse frenzy. It's a dance of tics and twitches, jerks and spasms, the agitation of a body broken down into individual components, then re-integrated.[37]

DDR players dance with each other through the video game, transporting themselves into each other's moves

ments through the purifying abstraction of the game commands, unburdened by the pressure of expressive agency that could be eroticized into sexual agency. The video game's atomization and abstraction of motion allows the dancers to re-embody that motion together—a mutually mimetic conjoining that effects bodily intimacy and contact.

"WOW! HOW COULD YOU MAKE UP A DANCE LIKE THIS?"

I would like to end with an exploration of the perplexing but common refrain amongst even the top players of *Dance Dance Revolution*—that they can't *really* dance. They can follow the steps in the game in a simulation of dancing skill, but throw them into a real dance club and they claim two left feet. Andrea Bowers, an artist who integrated *DDR* into a video installation piece, echoes the refrain by declaring "The games require no rhythm—nor, for that matter, any traditional dance skills."[38]

In a culture that insists on the reality of its mediated fictive experiences, from reality TV to docudrama to Web cams, why does *DDR,* which is marketed by Konami as a "dance simulation game," insist that it is not "real" dance, and why do its players concur? Certainly, there is a bit of the marketing plug in this insistence, so as to not frighten away video-game players who are more comfortable with games that direct attention to the screen rather than to the body of the person playing. But when virtual surgery applications are used for both training simulations and actual surgery, virtual pilot applications are used for both flight simulations and actual piloting, and scientific studies set out to prove that hand-eye coordination developed through video-game play prepares soldiers for combat fighting, then the insistence that *Dance Dance Revolution* is not dance, but only a simulation of dance, seems out of place.

What exactly is being simulated, what bodily investments do players have in a dance simulation experience that is both real movement and as-if-real dance, and where does that leave the status of "real" or non-simulated dancing, particularly that which is technologically, prosthetically, or otherwise artificially enabled? And to come from the other direction, if hitting what are essentially big buttons on a big controller in *DDR* can be considered dance or "like dance," what about other video-game playing experiences that require a synthesis of bodily reactions on a smaller scale? Is typing email, surfing the Web, or editing digital video with an internal rhythm carrying you from movement to movement also a form of dance? Rather than privileging rhythm and dance games as the most or the only embodied video games, I would like to acknowledge the embodied experience of all video-game play and all new media interactions, and the body's capacity to know and feel through mimetic movements both macro and micro. Henry Jenkins reminds us that rhythm action games:

> build on the excess kinetic energy that has always surrounded gameplay. Watch children play games and they sway with the movement of the figures on the screen, bouncing with the action, totally engaged with the moment. It is even more interesting to observe the responses of people watching them play, since they also mimic the actions which are occurring on the screen, even though their actions have no consequences on the game play.[39]

This returns us to assumptions about dance and video games that position dance as naturally embodied and video games as technologically disembodied, an opposition that makes it impossible to conceive of the bodily motion generated by a video game as dance. The distinction between simulated and real dance is not located in a particular movement itself, but in the discursive conventions that judge and define that movement as expressively, creatively generated by a human subject or hollowly, mechanically processed by an automaton. This distinction is mapped over dance's gender and race-inflected relationships to space, objects, and other bodies. Surgery, piloting, and warfare applications need to insist on the reality of a hostile, disorderly space occupied by malignant objects/bodies in order to produce a disembodied user that must be protected from this hostile world through the armor of a calibrated, better-than-real simulation. Dance simulation needs to insist on its non-real status as "only a game" in order to protect the clean, neutral space of computer-processed virtuality and the player's body-instrument from the seductive incursions of the authentically expressive body. Simulated dance contains the risk of feminine, racially other, and homoerotic self-contamination that the self-expressive dancing body would unleash. However, it is precisely the complexly mediated performance of a nonhuman, nonwhite, coded-as-other body that makes it possible to imagine the gameplay as a dance simulation rather than as real dancing. In other words, the technologically interpenetrated body's real experience of movement is made possible through an as-if-real experience of dancing through, as, and with a multiply-figured Other. It is this intertwining of technological alterity with racial, sexual, and national alterity, through the intensified motion and sensation of computer-driven dance, that fuses the pleasures and dangers of becoming-machine and becoming-data with those of becoming-Other. Contemporary new media studies that turn to the vital question of embodiment must therefore attend not only to the corporeal dimensions of digitality that challenge the "no-body" presumed by

earlier critical studies, but also to the embedded racial, sexual, and national identifications that historically shape the disappearance/reappearance, valorization/denigration of specific kinds of bodily presence.

If you watch a *DDR* video game run by itself, unactivated by a player, the game begins to look like a cross between a dance diagram in a "learn to cha-cha" book that notates dance steps and a "learn to breakdance" video that teaches hip-hop moves through images of expert dancers meant to be mimicked. The pleasures of masterful play emerge from the crucial tension between the "simulated" dancing of the abstract diagram and the "real" dancing of bodily memory and intuition, and the way this attenuation evokes the desired identities promised by digitality's infinite transmutability. *Dance Dance Revolution* players reconcile these oppositions between self and other, language and body, perception and action, abstraction and corporeality, automaton and agent, folding them into each other. By doing so, they reveal that dancing by numbers is a necessarily carnal experience, encompassing movement and sensation that is both real and as-if-real.

NOTES

1. By touting *Dance Dance Revolution* as radically active gaming, these articles position other video games as passive, sedentary, and disembodied. See Khanh T. L. Tran, "Karaoke for Feet—In the Latest Arcade Craze, Players Show a Machine Their Fanciest Footwork," *Wall Street Journal* (16 August 2000), Sec. B; Alice M. Lee, "Electric Boogie," *Entertainment Weekly* (4 August 2000), 16; Marco R. della Cava, "Karaoke for Your Feet," *USA Today* (21 August 2001), Sec. D. More recently, rhythm action games like *Dance Dance Revolution* have been hyped as "exergames" and "exertainment" that fight rather than contribute to the perceived crisis of childhood obesity. The Website Get Up and Move encourages people to lose weight by playing *DDR*; West Virginia's state health insurance agency is researching *DDR* as a cost-effective way to improve cardiovascular health; and a school district in California is integrating *DDR* into physical education classes. See Get Up and Move, http://www.getupmove.com; Ali-son Barker, "Study Uses Video Games to Fight Obesity," *USA Today* (4 April 2005); Selicia Kennedy-Ross, "PE to Wed with Video in Redlands," *San Bernardino Sun* (16 June 2005).
2. "Bemani," from the game *Beatmania* (1997), is actually the brand name of the rhythm action game line from the Japanese video game company Konami, creator of *Dance Dance Revolution,* which currently dominates the market in this genre. Other Konami Bemani games, listed with the year of the original U.S. version's release, include *Guitar Freaks* (1999), *Pop 'n' Music* (1999), *Para Para Paradise* (2000), *Drummania* (2002), *Mambo a Go Go* (2002), and *Karaoke Revolution* (2003). Bemani gameplay has its antecedents in the popular arcade game *Whac-a-Mole* (1976), which in turn evolved from carnival midway and amusement park games. Like early cinematic apparatuses, carnival games such as skeeball and shooting ranges involved the player's active physical participation. In fact, Bemani has been credited with revitalizing an arcade culture that had been languishing since the 1980s, as well as with opening up the social space of the arcade to female players, who have been more willing to play rhythm-action games than the shooting and fighting games that formerly dominated video arcades. See Maggie McKee, "Interactive Arcade Game Starts a Dance Revolution," *Santa Cruz Sentinel* (21 April 2000).
3. The Japanese-only *Game Boy* and *Game Boy 2* (both 2000), and *Game Boy 3, Game Boy Oha Sta,* and *Game Boy Disney Mix* (all 2001) releases are played on the portable, handheld Nintendo Game Boy. The Microsoft Xbox *Ultramix* (2003), *Ultramix 2* (2004), and *Ultramix 3* (2005) and Sony Playstation 2 *Extreme 2* (2005) versions support online play. The Sony Playstation 2 *Extreme* (2004) and *Extreme 2* versions support the EyeToy digital camera. The major releases of *Dance Dance Revolution* are as follows, in roughly chronological order: *DDR, DDR Disney Mix, DDR Game Boy, DDR Konamix, DDR Max, DDR Extreme, DDR Ultramix, DDR Mario Mix,* and *DDR SuperNOVA.*
4. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 9, 15.
5. In his book *Bodies in Technology* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), Don Ihde opposes video game play's "reduced set of bodily actions" to the "healthy, implicitly athletic embodiment" (18) of Merleau-Ponty's "free–flowing, active 'sports body'" (15) in order to critique Merleau-Ponty's secretly normative body. However, Ihde erases the possibility of conceiving of an active, intentional body in video-game play at the same time. Dance is used as a foil to the video game's diminished embodiment: "The Nintendo phenomenon that emphasizes eye/hand actions has been seen to span bodies in technologies ranging from video games to surgery and is a new, if restricted, style of movement that is very far from bodily sports activity or dance, whether classical ballet or modern" (138).
6. Johannes Birringer, *Media & Performance Along the Border* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 39.
7. Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic and Electronic 'Presence,'" *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 161, 152.
8. Felicia McCarren, *Dancing Machines* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 5.
9. See Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Genre, Gender, Excess," in *Film Genre Reader III,* ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003), 141-59.
10. See Dawn Bryant, "Game Puts Twist on Dance," *The Sun News,* Myrtle Beach, S.C. (19 June 2002); Susan Lieu, "DDR: The Young and the Agile," *The San Francisco Examiner* (22 September 2002); Jimmy Magahern, "Dance Dance Fever: Valley Arcade Rats Find Fame on the DDR Dance Pad," *The Phoenix New Times* (9 September 2004), Jason Ko, *DDR Freak,* http://www.ddrfreak.com.
11. See Mark B. N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004) for a valuable challenge to critical studies of new media technologies that focus on their capacity to transcend rather than re-invest the human body.
12. The female voice in *Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix* is credited to Audio Angel, also known as Rashida Clendening, an African-American actress and voice talent who is prominent in the San Francisco drum and bass music scene.

13. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 109.
14. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 152.
15. In the Super Cockpit virtual reality system, the Air Force pilot is securely strapped into a helmet-mounted display that blocks out sensory connections to the physical world and replaces them with three-dimensional projections that "exactly mimicked the world outside," except with information such as compass heading and flight path superimposed on the field of vision (Manovich, 111).
16. Vivian Sobchack, "'Choreography for One, Two, and Three Legs' (A Phenomenological Meditation in Movements)," *Topoi,* vol. 24, no. 1 (January 2005): 56.
17. Video games that capture dimensions of bodily movement beyond accurate hits to a punch-pad type of controller have recently emerged. In the *DDR* family, *Dance Dance Revolution Extreme* (2004) and *Extreme 2* (2005) integrate the EyeToy camera to capture the motion of players' hands and feet waving through the air, and *Karaoke Revolution Party* (2005) integrates the *DDR* dance pad with a microphone to capture both dance steps and singing. More extreme, although less widely played, is the video game *The Journey to the Wild Divine: The Passage* (2003). Promising a "reunion of mind, body, and spirit," *Wild Divine* is controlled by a biofeedback device that measures your heart rate and perspiration. Players must modulate their breathing and level of excitement to navigate a mystical fantasy world where they accomplish exercises such as levitating balls, shooting arrows, lighting fires, and controlling the flight patterns of birds.
18. Massumi, 6. Massumi's invocation of Henri Bergson's critique of Zeno's paradox of the arrow resonates provocatively with the streams of arrows in *Dance Dance Revolution,* which do not stop the game's movement as they pass through their targets, but flare in intensity and continue streaming until the song or the game ends. *DDR*'s flocks of arrows, however, never hit their target and stop. They never provide the cessation that enables the retrospective plotting of the positions that divide their trajectory, and therefore radically resist positioning: "Movement, in process, cannot be determinately indexed by anything outside of itself. It has withdrawn into an all-encompassing relation with what it will be. It is in becoming, absorbed in occupying its field of potential" (7).
19. Ibid., 5.
20. Simon Reynolds, "Technical Ecstasy," *The Wire* 105 (November 1992): 36. Most of *DDR*'s dance tracks, such as "MaxX Unlimited," "Brilliant2U," and "Dynamite Rave" are songs composed specifically for the Konami Bemani series, but more recent versions of the game feature licensed songs and music-video clips in abridged form. The screen-faced orientation of the player's body in *DDR* may emerge as much from rave and electronic dance music culture as from the videogame convention of player-facing-screen. In her analysis of the bodily movements of disco dancing versus those of rave dancing, Helen Thomas observes that rave dancers do not shift eyes, focus, and direction, nor project their bodies into 360-degree space or across the dance floor: "In contrast to the older dancers whose front and eye focus changed through stepping and turning and whose gestures inhabited the space around the body, the younger people danced on the spot, with their feet . . . keeping a distinctive light (pulse-like) bounce . . . focusing to the front." See Helen Thomas, "Dancing the Night Away: Rave/Club Culture," in *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 203.
21. Henry Jenkins, "Games, the New Lively Art," in *Handbook of Computer Game Studies,* ed. Joost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 180.
22. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes,* ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 146.
23. See *The Red Shoes* (1948), directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, for a highly self-reflexive cinematic interpretation of the fairy tale.
24. Vivian Sobchack, "What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh," in *Carnal Thoughts,* 67.
25. Ibid., 71.
26. Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen," 159.
27. Merleau-Ponty, 151.
28. *DDR*'s "MaxX Unlimited" and "The Legend of MaxX" reach an arrow-scrolling speed as fast as 320 beats per minute. The human heart at rest averages 72 BPM and dance club music typically plays at 120-180 beats per minute.
29. See Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections,* ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 333-36.
30. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 246.
31. Ibid., 192.
32. These fans of anime, manga, and gaming call themselves cosplayers, or "costume players."
33. McCarren, 34.
34. As the mythic location of Western cyberpunk dystopias, Japan in particular "has become synonymous with the technologies of the future . . . a future that seems to be transcending and displacing Western modernity." See David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 167.
35. Taussig, 144.
36. Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 53.
37. Reynolds, 36.
38. Andrea Bowers, "Top Ten," *Artforum,* vol. 39, no. 9 (May 2001): 38. Bowers' video installation is *Democracy's Body - Dance Dance Revolution* (2001).
39. Jenkins, 183.

IRENE CHIEN is a doctoral student in Film Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where she works on race, gender, and new media.

ABSTRACT While dance has been theorized as consummately embodied, digitality has been charged with rendering flesh-bound "meatware" obsolete. This essay explores the body propelled into motion by the "dance simulation" video game *Dance Dance Revolution*, to show how racial and sexual identifications shape the encounter between human body and digital technology.

■ DAVID WELKY

GLOBAL HOLLYWOOD VERSUS NATIONAL PRIDE

The Battle to Film *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*

MOTION PICTURES PLAY a significant role in determining how people around the world perceive their own and other societies. Governments have therefore been sensitive to cinematic portrayals of their countries and are quick to complain when they feel that a movie treats their citizens poorly. An example of this occurred in 2002, when Canadian-Armenian writer-director Atom Egoyan released *Ararat,* a fictional depiction of efforts to make a movie about the 1914 massacre of Armenians in the Turkish city of Van. Egoyan supplemented this film-within-a-film structure with subplots that considered the tragedy's effects on future generations and pondered the relationship between history and memory. It was the first major picture to examine the Turkish genocide of one-and-a-half million Armenians during World War I.[1]

Turkey had long insisted that there was no organized campaign to eradicate Armenians and strongly opposed suggestions to the contrary. *Ararat* touched off a new round of angry denials and charges of hate mongering. Egoyan received a flood of hostile emails and detractors set up Web sites that disputed his movie's truthfulness. Turks in Canada and elsewhere threatened to boycott all films from the film's distributor, Miramax, and its parent company, Disney. There were rumors that the Turkish government would take legal action to bar the picture worldwide. State minister Yilmaz Karakoyunlu told the *Ankara Daily News* that "Turkey will do everything possible against this film. It is a shameful production."[2]

Many were understandably surprised when, after attending *Ararat's* premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, an organizer of the Istanbul Film Festival announced that he would push to screen the movie in his homeland. Turkey's Culture and Tourism Minister, Erkan Mumcu, agreed that his country could "easily tolerate such things" and argued that a "strong reaction to this movie would only help keep the subject on the agenda." He demanded only that a scene of Ottoman soldiers raping Armenian women be cut, as it violated Turkey's law forbidding depictions of soldiers in uniform committing war crimes.[3]

Turkey's new tolerance stemmed from the recent election of a moderate government that was eager to bolster the country's bid to join the European Union by allowing more freedom of expression. Just days before *Ararat* was scheduled to open in Ankara and Istanbul, however, the film's Turkish distributor yanked it in response to pressure from Ulku Ocaklari, a right-wing nationalist party with ties to paramilitary groups. The extremists had warned people planning to attend the movie that "whoever wants to destroy the unity of this nation and the will of our existence should be ready to pay the price." Aris Balbikian, a spokesman for Canadian-Armenians, saw deep political, social, and cultural meaning in this battle. "Turkey is searching for its soul," he explained. "There are some elements who don't like what's happening in Turkey: the democratizing of human rights, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. They don't want the healthy discussion and dialogue a film like *Ararat* would bring."[4]

History has a funny way of repeating itself. Although no one seemed to remember it, this was not the first time a celluloid version of the alleged Armenian genocide had aroused nationalistic feelings, international debate, and discussions of art's role in the world of realpolitik. Almost 70 years earlier, talk of a cinematic rendition of Franz Werfel's novel *The Forty Days*

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of Musa Dagh (*Die Vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh,* 1933) had touched off a controversy even more intense, passionate, and dangerous than that inspired by *Ararat.*

Major American movie studios spent 48 years trying to film the novel, only to be derailed by a series of domestic and international obstacles. An examination of this struggle, which was particularly intense during the Depression of the 1930s, illuminates the political, social, and economic issues that Hollywood faced in this time of global crisis. It also demonstrates the perils inherent in American dominance of the world market. The film capital's unprecedented capability to spread powerful images and messages made it an obvious target for attacks from nationalistic groups concerned by its depictions of their homelands. The majors' need for overseas revenue, which accounted for around 40 percent of their profits, left them vulnerable to such assaults and, as the example of *Musa Dagh* shows, fearful of making any film that might offend anyone.[5]

FRANZ WERFEL WAS BORN in Prague in 1890, the son of wealthy members of the city's German-speaking Jewish community. He was a dreamy and distracted boy who reveled in literature, theater, and opera. The life of a writer, which allowed for late nights at the opera and long visits to cafés with Franz Kafka and other colleagues, appealed to his dislike of structure and schedule. He published his first collection of poems, *The Friend of the World,* to great acclaim in 1911. He kept writing during his service with the Austrian Army during World War I. His greatest military talent seemed to be his ability to avoid combat duty. Assignments to military offices in Prague, Vienna, and Switzerland left him with abundant time to write. His fame grew after the war: *Juarez and Maximilian,* his 1924 drama of the Mexican Revolution, established him as a formidable playwright. Such prose works as *Verdi: A Novel of the Opera* (1923) and *The Pure at Heart* (1929) won him even more popular acclaim.[6]

"Any place in the world today . . . [could] start a big bonfire motion picturewise."

Frederick Herron

The inspiration for his best-known work came during a 1930 visit to the Middle East. While touring Damascus, he encountered a group of crippled and emaciated Armenians orphaned by a Turkish massacre. Although Werfel had read reports of the genocide during the War, this was the first time its human impact truly registered with him. He spent the rest of his trip locating survivors and listening to their stories. From them he learned of the heroic resistance on Musa Dagh (Mountain of Moses), where some 5,000 Armenians held off a Turkish force for 53 days before being rescued by French and British ships. Fascinated, Werfel determined to write a novel about the siege of Musa Dagh and the larger Armenian genocide.[7]

The Forty Days of Musa Dagh centers on Gabriel Bagradian, a wealthy Armenian who spent 22 years in Paris before returning to his ancestral village with his French wife, Juliette, and his son, Stephen. His homecoming coincides with the first stages of a methodical campaign to wipe out the Ottoman Empire's Armenian population. Gabriel rallies the villagers and leads them to Musa Dagh, where they fight starvation, internal disputes, and the Turkish Army in a desperate struggle for survival. While clearly sympathizing with the Armenians, Werfel's book included both humanitarian Turks and mean-spirited Armenians. It blamed the atrocities on the actions of Turks, Armenians, and Europeans alike.[8]

The novel won high praise in Austria and Switzerland. It found less favor in Germany, the author's adopted country. Many of *Musa Dagh*'s European readers saw a connection between the persecution of Turkey's Armenian minority and the Nazis' rhetoric toward the Jews. Although the Nazis agreed with this analysis and therefore disapproved of the novel, they lacked either the authority or the will to block its publication. The book sold well in Germany until February of 1934, when the Nazis succumbed to pressure from the Turkish Government and agreed to halt its sales, ostensibly as a threat to public order and safety.[9]

However, neither the Germans nor the Turks could prevent the translation of *Musa Dagh* into English. It appeared in the United States in the fall of 1934 and rose to the top of the best-seller list. The Book of the Month Club made it a featured selection, helping to push American sales to around 150,000. Armenian Americans viewed Werfel as a hero—"a friend God has sent"—and mobbed him when he visited the United States in late 1935. Reviewers also responded positively. The *Boston Transcript* called it "a book to read, re-read and read again." Writing in the *Saturday Review of Literature,* William Saroyan lamented that while *Musa Dagh* was long (817 pages), "in swiftness of movement it is all too short. Reading it, one hopes it might never end." Many American critics saw connections between Werfel's book and current events even though it was, and still is, unclear whether the author intended to allude to Nazi Germany. The *New York Times*' John

Chamberlain interpreted *Musa Dagh*'s plea for protection of minorities as "a burning, bitter and inspired protest against the Young Turk proclivities of the German Nazi movement." Louis Kronenberger insisted that "it is hard not to read between the lines," noting "the extremely close parallel between the plight of the Armenians under the Turks and that of the Jews under Hitler."[10]

Kronenberger also observed that, "if Hollywood does not mar and mishandle" the novel, "it should make a magnificent movie." Hollywood was in fact already hard at work on transforming the book into a film. Metro Goldwyn Mayer paid Werfel $15,000 for the screen rights in early 1934—a considerable sum for a novel that had not yet been published in the United States—and sent a 52-page synopsis to Joseph Breen's Studio Relations Committee (SRC) in March of 1934.[11] An MGM reader labeled *Musa Dagh* "an epic of exceptional strength; a combination of grim reality and colorful romance with a background that permits almost every variation and adaptation." The reader did not anticipate any international difficulties. Neither did the SRC. Breen informed MGM head Louis B. Mayer that this "gripping and interesting historical epic" would present "no serious difficulty from the foreign angle" so long as the scenes of Turkish persecution were not too graphic.[12]

MGM and Breen's benevolent reports suggest startling naïveté and an inability to grasp the importance other countries put on its products. This was surprising because American studios had dealt with overseas animosity before. Mexico, for example, had briefly banned American films in 1922 after tiring of cinematic representations of its people as greasers and ragged outlaws. Several other Latin-American countries followed its lead. Italy had recently forced MGM to cut a scene that showed an organ grinder warbling in nonsensical Italian from every print of *Have a Heart* (1934) distributed within Europe.[13]

Nevertheless, with the SRC's approval in hand, Mayer put his son-in-law, David O. Selznick (who had been brought in to produce for MGM after Irving Thalberg suffered a heart attack in 1933), in charge of the movie. Selznick was the first to sense the danger in the project. He decided to soft-pedal the novel's message by putting the blame for the atrocities on a single Turk, rather than on Turkey as a whole. He also asked Frederick Herron, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America's (MPPDA) New York-based foreign manager, to let the Turkish government know that MGM was planning to film *Musa Dagh*. Herron recognized the movie was a potential lightning rod that could have a terrible impact on the entire industry. Bypassing the California-based Selznick, he plotted strategy with William Orr, who worked in MGM's New York offices, before contacting the Turks. Herron suggested moving the film's setting back 20 years to disassociate it from anyone currently in the Turkish government and emphasized the importance of depicting the Turks as "outstanding fine characters." He implored MGM to treat the "French-Turk situation" with extreme care. The two countries were close allies. The Turks emulated elements of France's culture, language, educational system, and military structure, and France was a major player in Turkish financial affairs. Should Turkey boycott the film, it could persuade France to join it. "While the Turkish market does not amount to much financially," Herron reminded Orr, "our French market is a very important one." Herron worried that, in this age of rising nationalism, "any place in the world today is in a position to fan a flame that can start a big bonfire motion picturewise."[14]

Herron's admonition came in the midst of larger domestic and international challenges that were changing the way Hollywood did business. Religious and civic groups had long accused the film industry of poisoning Americans' morals with movies that glamorized vice, crime, sex, and violence. The major studios had responded to these complaints with self-censorship programs—including the SRC—designed to prove that they did not require government intervention. Voluntary codes, however, did little to alter the content of motion pictures or placate the moralists, whose outrage only grew as Hollywood churned out lurid sex comedies and violent gangster films in the early 1930s.

Matters came to a head in 1934. In April, a group of Catholic Bishops, egged on by a frustrated Joseph Breen, formed the Legion of Decency and encouraged their congregations to boycott movies that the new group deemed immoral. Other religious and civic organizations joined in, and Hollywood's receipts plummeted as much as 40 percent in some cities. The empty theaters terrified the movie moguls, who took drastic action to save their skins. On July 1, 1934, they installed Breen at the helm of a new Production Code Administration (PCA). Unlike the SRC, the PCA had teeth. MPPDA members, which included all of the major studios, could not release or distribute a film without the PCA's seal of approval. Among the more important articles in the newly enforced production code was one requiring that "the history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations . . . be represented fairly." It was an ambiguous clause that the PCA interpreted broadly in the hopes of protecting the industry's

economic interests by ensuring that its products did not offend any national, religious, or ethnic group.[15]

Hollywood's initial interest in *Musa Dagh* also coincided with a rising tide of nationalism in Europe. As Hitler's forces consolidated their hold on Germany, they tried to purify the country's culture by abolishing foreign influences; by mid-1934, Hollywood movies were banned with regularity. Italy had recently hiked taxes on foreign films and established a quota system requiring exhibitors to show at least one Italian-made movie for every three new productions they screened. The world market was becoming less accommodating at a time when Hollywood needed it most. With their domestic market struggling in the midst of the Great Depression, the industry's leaders were increasingly willing to appease any force that threatened the foreign revenues they needed to maintain profitability.[16]

TURKEY ANNOUNCED its interest in the cinematic version of *Musa Dagh* in November 1934, just days before the novel hit American bookstores. Turkish Ambassador to the United States Mehmet Münir Ertegün voiced his displeasure with the project to the State Department's head of Near Eastern Affairs, Wallace Murray, even though he knew that the American government had no official power to halt it. Mehmet Münir worried that the movie would give "a distorted version of the alleged massacres" that would stir up anti-Turkish sentiments and asked Murray to work informally to block it. Murray assured him that the studios were eager to avoid a conflict and was confident that the matter could be resolved.[17]

Even though Murray was unfamiliar with *Musa Dagh*—both he and Mehmet Münir thought that Paramount owned the rights—he knew whom to contact. MPPDA President Will Hays was Hollywood's top troubleshooter. The former Postmaster General had extensive political connections and was accustomed to dealing with domestic and international crises. Murray passed along Mehmet Münir's concerns and asked whether Paramount was indeed producing *Musa Dagh.* Hays, in turn, leaned on Frederick Herron to nip the dispute in the bud. The foreign manager assured Murray that MGM planned to focus on the relationship between Gabriel, the leader of the besieged Armenians, and his French family. Not only did the script avoid dwelling on "the Armenian massacre," he explained, it "did not refer to it at all." Herron promised to keep an eye on the film and insisted that "there will be nothing included in it that could offend the Turkish Ambassador or his countrymen." Mehmet Münir seemed satisfied, and the affair appeared to blow over. A relieved Robert Skinner, America's Ambassador to Turkey, congratulated the State Department for ensuring that the production would not cause him any headaches down the road.[18]

Turkey had good reasons to scrutinize Hollywood. With its graphic scenes of Armenian sufferings and Turkish atrocities, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* was a potential public-relations disaster at a time when Turkey was deeply concerned about its image. Under Kemal Atatürk's leadership, post-World War I Turkey had undergone a series of reforms designed to align it with the West. It abandoned theocracy, adopted the Latin alphabet, granted equal rights to women, and developed a progressive system of public education. Atatürk also worked to ensure stability by building a spirit of Turkish, rather than Arabic or Ottoman, identity. The government, the press, and the schools battled centuries of European scorn by boosting national self-esteem with triumphant narratives of Turkish civilization and history. *Musa Dagh's* storyline veered wildly from the party line. If exhibited on the world's theater screens, it could undercut Turkish efforts to cultivate a patriotic citizenry and win Western acceptance. Turkish efforts at modernization, moreover, needed help from abroad. Many of its cities had been devastated by years of war, and the country could not plan and pay for infrastructure improvements and industrialization without aid. A film like *Musa Dagh* could reinforce long-held stereotypes and convince Westerners to seek out more promising opportunities for their investments and expertise.[19]

A piece in the *Hollywood Reporter* reignited the dispute in April of 1935. The article claimed that MGM was proceeding with *Musa Dagh* and had approached William Wellman to direct. The Turks heard from other sources that the script mentioned Turkish atrocities. Mehmet Münir shot off a letter to the State Department demanding that it prevent MGM from making the movie. Murray took up the matter with Herron, who blamed the *Reporter* article on an "enthusiastic publicity man" and assured the Division Chief that MGM would not be so foolish as to raise the thorny issue of genocide. Herron's faith in MGM's wisdom was less than absolute. He privately asked Joseph Breen to monitor the project from his Hollywood office.[20]

The problem did not go away, and Herron found himself shuttling between the participants in the drama. Feeling betrayed and angered by the film's reemergence, Mehmet Münir told Herron that Turkey would ban *Musa Dagh* no matter what scenes it cut. Although he accepted Herron's offer to send a script to the embassy, he did not indicate that the script had any chance of winning his approval. Herron, on the other

hand, refused to pressure MGM to shut down its production when Mehmet Münir gave his inevitable disapproval. MGM tossed gasoline on the flames by announcing *Musa Dagh* as a major feature on its upcoming 1935-1936 schedule and promoting it with an essay-writing contest in *Modern Screen Magazine*.[21]

Fearing that *Musa Dagh* could poison U.S.-Turkish relations, Division Chief Murray begged Herron to stop the madness. He explained that the film would be banned in Turkey. He explained that the film would be banned in Germany. He explained that the film would be banned in the Balkans. None of his arguments affected Herron, whose only real fear was that Turkey would persuade France to ban it. Meanwhile, Turkish newspapers began running anti-American articles and calling for boycotts of all MGM films. A frazzled Ambassador Skinner, who had been kept out of the loop, cabled to the State Department: "Revival Armenian Question can serve no useful purpose."Murray could not have agreed more.[22]

After failing to make headway with the MPPDA or the State Department, Mehmet Münir turned his attention to MGM itself. The studio dispatched one of its vice presidents, J. Robert Rubin, to meet with the furious Ambassador. Mehmet Münir informed Rubin in no uncertain terms that "Turkish honor" was on the line. His country would ban not only *Musa Dagh,* but all MGM films, if the studio went forward with the project. Rubin, who had likely read neither the book nor the screenplay and therefore did not fully understand the controversy, left a copy of MGM's scenario with the Ambassador. He seemed to feel he had accomplished something.[23]

Momentum continued to run against the studio, which seemed unable to coordinate its words on the East Coast with its actions on the West Coast. Fearing that the movie would inspire a new round of ethnic hatred, many in Turkey's Armenian community began protesting MGM's production. In late July, Istanbul's Board of Censors, which represented Turkey's largest movie market, voted to shut out all MGM products if the studio made *Musa Dagh.* Rumors abounded that Turkey was trying to convince France to do the same. Fearing a major international incident and wanting to keep his government clear of the fray, Murray told anyone who would listen that he had made it "perfectly clear" to MGM that "unfortunate repercussions might follow" if it pushed the film forward.[24]

MGM's Irving Thalberg had been a fan of *Musa Dagh* from the start and had urged Louis B. Mayer to purchase the rights to it. By mid-1935 he had recovered to the point where he was ready to take control of *Musa Dagh* from Selznick. The producer resented both Turkey's and New York's interference in his affairs. He had already agreed to Selznick's plan to place the blame upon one Turk and saw no need for further concessions. "To hell with the Turks," he complained. "I'm going to make the picture anyway." He envisioned a lavish spectacle and penciled in Clark Gable and William Powell as the stars. Mayer did not see matters the same way and, facing pressure from both New York and Washington, was starting to sour on the project. Thalberg was livid. "What can the Turks do if we make *Musa Dagh*?" he asked. "Okay, let them keep us out of their 30 theaters." Mayer agreed that the Turkish market was unimportant, but he could not bear the prospect of losing France, which accounted for about ten percent of MGM's foreign revenues. He and the other movie moguls were already reeling from signs that the French might impose quotas or raise taxes on American films and hesitated to alienate either France or the State Department, which would be an essential ally in any fight to preserve MGM's economic interests.[25]

"The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations should be represented fairly."

PCA Production Code

The Turkish press added to Mayer's discomfort by launching a new barrage of attacks in September 1935. Joseph Breen passed these articles on to MGM as a not-so-subtle way of expressing his distaste for the studio's stubbornness. Pieces in *La République, Haber,* and *Son Posta* slammed Werfel's novel as maliciously bad history and called for boycotts of MGM films. To patronize MGM would be akin to "feeding a serpent in our very bosom." The press accused Werfel and MGM of circulating outdated stereotypes that could irreparably harm Turkey's reputation among Europeans and Americans. "We thought that we were their equals and were recognized as such by them," *La République* complained. "We were deceived in believing that their opinion of us had changed." Equally unnerving were the press's references to Werfel as "a shameless Jew" and to MGM as a Jewish-dominated corporation. Anti-Semitism was on the rise in Turkey, and there was talk of relocating Jews to the hinterlands as a way of diffusing tension. Some in the American government suspected that Vedat Nedim Tor, Turkey's Director General of the Press, was behind such attacks. Vedat Nadim had studied propaganda under Josef Goebbels, a fact that

gave the newspaper campaign's "under-current of anti-Semitism" an even more sinister tinge.[26]

Sensing his strong position and the Americans' unwillingness to offend him, Mehmet Münir pushed the crisis further. In a letter to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, the Ambassador once again denounced the production and demanded that the U.S. government either stop it or face a break in U.S.-Turkish relations. In response, Hull ordered Wallace Murray to broker a solution by going straight to the top. Murray accordingly demanded Will Hays' assistance in "disposing of a question which appears to be assuming very large proportions in the minds of the officials at Ankara." Hays, who understood the importance of maintaining strong relations with the State Department better than most in Hollywood, promised the MPPDA's cooperation and increased its efforts to force the renegade studio to comply.[27]

The attacks from the Turkish press, the fear of losing the French market, the disapproval of the Hays Office, and the need to stay on the State Department's good side finally crushed MGM's resistance. In early October 1935, William Orr admitted to Ambassador Mehmet Münir that filming *Musa Dagh,* "whatever modifications it might be subjected to, could not but be harmful from every standpoint." Mehmet Münir extended his "best thanks and hearty appreciation" to Wallace Murray for the State Department's support and assured him that his actions had created "an excellent impression in my country." American Ambassador Skinner was equally thankful that the State Department's actions had such a "happy effect." The only person to voice his unhappiness was Thalberg. "We've lost our guts," he complained, "and when that happens to a studio, you can kiss it good-bye."[28]

"To hell with the Turks. I'm going to make the picture anyway."

Irving Thalberg

Turkey maintained its close watch on MGM. Any mention of the film in the Hollywood trade press brought a new round of inquiries from Mehmet Münir and a new round of denials that MGM was considering the project. And yet it was not completely dead. Thalberg still wanted to make the movie and lobbied Rubin and other MGM executives in New York to get on board. Joseph Breen also had some inexplicable interest in continuing. In late 1935, he asked the American Red Cross for information on Armenian relief efforts during and immediately after World War I. He explained, unfortunately without elaborating, that the material might be of use in the *Musa Dagh* screenplay. Perhaps he hoped to find a way for MGM to use the well-known title while completely changing the focus of the story. David O. Selznick, by now an independent producer, briefly considered reviving the film in 1936. It was hard to let go of a property with such earning potential, but fears of arousing a new diplomatic crisis ensured that these talks went nowhere.[29]

AFTER THE *MUSA DAGH* debacle, Hollywood accommodated the demands of foreign governments over the next few years. MGM cancelled shooting *It Can't Happen Here* to avoid antagonizing Germany and defanged the anti-war comedy *Idiot's Delight* (1939) to appease overseas opposition. Sam Goldwyn went through similar contortions during the production of *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (1938). The fear of retribution led Hollywood to nearly ignore the Spanish Civil War. Walter Wanger's *Blockade* (1938) came closest to exploring its issues and impact, but the dangers of angering Spain, the Catholic Church, Germany, Italy, Latin America, and anyone in the United States who worried about their country being dragged into another conflict forced Wanger to create a confusing and ambiguous film that refused to name the sides or explain what they were fighting about.[30]

Changing circumstances, however, returned *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* to the forefront in late 1938. The Nazis had by this point barred most American pictures from Germany and its conquered territories, and restrictive legislation in Italy would force the studios to abandon that market at the end of the year. With its European revenues disappearing anyway, MGM toyed with the idea of finally filming the best-selling novel in the hopes of racking up big domestic profits. Mayer was interested, but not enough to inform the company's New York office that he was considering the controversial subject again. The trade press soon caught wind of the story and the Turkish diplomats again descended on the State Department, which —worried that MGM's willingness to "disregard all scruples" would imperil other American businesses operating in Turkey—quickly clamped down on the studio.[31] Using Herron as its primary contact, the Department made it clear that MGM should "do nothing to aggravate our relationship" with the Turks. Herron, who had read the same press reports as the Turks and had no desire to see *Musa Dagh* go forward, had already enlisted Breen to snoop around Hollywood. Breen confirmed that work on the script was proceeding but also gained assurances that MGM would stop if the government had "serious objections."[32]

Herron was furious that MGM had again put him in an awkward position. The foreign manager relayed Breen's findings to Washington along with assurances that the MPPDA would do whatever was necessary to kill the production. Faced with a united front of opposition, MGM dropped the project for the second time. It was a decision that contained a deep and troubling irony. Many who read *Musa Dagh* interpreted it as a parable of Hitler's treatment of the Jews. By not shooting the film, Selznick, Thalberg, Mayer, Rubin, and other Hollywood Jews were ignoring the lesson of the book. They turned their backs on the alleged Armenian massacre just as the rest of the world turned its back on the fate of German Jews.[33]

World War II reshaped the world, but Turkish attitudes toward *Musa Dagh* remained unchanged. Word that Hollywood was planning to shoot the movie spread again in 1950, and again the Turkish Embassy complained that such a film "would do irreparable harm to the relationship between Turkey and the United States." Even though the rumors proved untrue, Turkey's strong reaction suggested that the subject was still a sore spot. And yet the project would not die. Pandro S. Berman, Joseph Pasternak, Walter Wanger, and many others considered producing it in the following years. By 1969, when Jerry Gershwin and Elliott Kastner Productions announced *Musa Dagh* yet again, it had become "the most 'on again, off again' major literary property in the history of American motion pictures." MGM had spent a reported $1 million in scriptwriting fees, producer costs, and various other expenses since purchasing the rights in 1934. Not surprisingly, Gershwin and Kastner's company never shot a foot of film.[34]

MGM eventually sold the rights to California real-estate developer and Hollywood novice John Kurkjian. Even though he had never been on a movie set, Kurkjian still believed he could turn *Musa Dagh* into a profitable film that would make him a hero in the Armenian community. He waited for studios to knock on his door with lucrative production deals. They never did. After holding the title for about a decade, Kurkjian found himself in a jam. His agreement with MGM stated that the rights would revert to the studio if he did not make the movie within a given time. In 1982, just six weeks before the deadline, he decided to make it himself. He hired a young screenwriter named Alex Hakobian, dumped nearly a dozen versions of *Musa Dagh* scripts on his desk, and demanded that he "take the best from each one and make a great screenplay."[35]

Hakobian did what he could to turn out a respectable screenplay, but the film never had a chance of meeting the grand expectations that MGM once had for it. Kurkjian's promises of a budget of $8 to $10 million evaporated, forcing director Sarky Mouradian to rip out scene after scene in order to save money. He shot *Musa Dagh* in the foothills of Malibu for about $1 million—roughly the amount MGM budgeted for it back in 1934. The resulting movie was a slapped-together farce that lacked cohesiveness. It never had a theatrical release and was savaged by the few critics who bothered to see it. *Variety* called it "a dreary little film that does no justice to its weighty subject."[36]

German director Ottokar Runze later gained control of the rights and, in 1989, a West German company announced plans to film a $25-million version of the novel. Runze has not yet made his movie. At this time, *Ararat* is the only movie about the Armenian genocide that has appeared in American theaters. Ironically, MGM again played an obstructionist role, as Miramax agreed to distribute the $11-million picture only after MGM's chief executive, Alex Yemenidjian, decided that "economically it did not make much sense" for his studio to handle it.[37]

Yemenidjian's concern reflects the ethos that has always driven Hollywood. It is also indicative of a side of the industry that the public has long been willing to overlook. Few fans had even the slightest awareness of the international ruckus MGM provoked in 1934 and struggled to manage for the rest of the decade. It barely registered even in the trade press. Most were interested only in what appeared on the screen; the political and economic machinations that lurked backstage were irrelevant. To ignore the Dream Factory's intrigues and maneuverings, however, is to ignore the forces that determine what could and could not appear in theaters. The actions of both Hollywood and Washington show that artistic integrity and ideological content took a back seat to financial reality even during those most ideological of times. When faced with the choice of exposing the sufferings of the past or preserving financial and political peace in the present, power brokers on both coasts chose the latter. The history of *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* reveals a Hollywood straining to understand its place in a complex world of high emotions and competing interests. MGM's difficulties in navigating these choppy waters indicate that the industry had not yet learned the rules to what was indeed a very tricky game. The state of the world at the end of the 1930s suggested that even more dangerous shoals lay ahead.

NOTES

1. Turkey still denies that there was an organized plan to eliminate the Armenian people during World War I and, although

most historians argue the contrary, some agree. The reality, unreality, or exaggeration of the Armenian genocide, however, is irrelevant here and will not be taken up in this essay.

2. *Variety* (13-19 May 2002); Interview with Atom Egoyan, "N.P.R. Weekend Edition" (1 September 2002); *New York Times* (7 June 2002).
3. *Ottawa Citizen* (31 December 2003); *Victoria* (B.C.) *Times Colonist* (7 January 2004).
4. *Toronto Star* (6 January 2004); *Victoria* (B.C.) *Times Colonist* (7 January 2004).
5. Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 21. Edward Minasian's "The Forty Years of Musa Dagh: The Film That Was Denied," *Journal of Armenian Studies* 2 (Fall/Winter 1985-1986): 63-73, uses documents from the MGM archives to discuss the battles over shooting the film during 1934 and 1935. Minasian does not describe the flare-up that occurred a few years later, and documents from additional locations complete and expand our understanding of the events he outlined.
6. Peter Stephan Jungk, *Franz Werfel: A Life in Prague, Vienna, and Hollywood* (New York: Fromm, 1991), 3-61, 99-126; Lionel B. Steiman, *Franz Werfel—The Faith of an Exile: From Prague to Beverly Hills* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1985), 9-18.
7. Franz Werfel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (1934) (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1983), vii.
8. The truth or untruth of *Musa Dagh* is not considered here. For more on Werfel's research, see George Schulz-Behrend, "Sources and Background of Werfel's Novel *Die Vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh*," *Germanic Review* 26 (1951): 111-23; D. J. Enright, "The Ghosts of Apes: Franz Werfel's *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*," in Enright, *The Apothecary's Shop: Essays on Literature* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957), 145-67; Maria Berl Lee, "Agony, Pathos and the Turkish Side in Werfel's *Die Vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh*," *Philological Papers* 31 (1986): 58-65; and Lee, "'Defictionalizing' *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*," *The Armenian Review* 26 (Spring 1973): 3-59.
9. Jungk, 137-45.
10. Ibid., 154; Jennifer Michaels, *Franz Werfel and the Critics* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1994), 87-88; *Boston Transcript* (19 December 1934); *Saturday Review of Literature* 11 (8 December 1934): 335; *New York Times* (2 December 1934); *New York Times* (6 January 1936). For differing interpretations of the Nazi influence on *Musa Dagh,* see Steiman, 70-83 and Jungk, 137-42.
11. The SRC had existed since 1927 as an element of the major studios' trade organization, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association. Its primary function was to review scripts and warn producers of any material that was likely to be cut by local censorship boards. Although all of the majors sent their scripts to SRC, the board had no power to enforce its suggestions. *New York Times* (2 December 1934); *Hollywood Reporter* (8 March 1934); Minasian, 64; Frank Miller, *Censored Hollywood: Sex, Sin & Violence on Screen* (Atlanta, GA: Turner Publishing, Inc., 1994), 52-53, 78-79.
12. Marjorie Haddock to Joseph I. Breen, 26 March 1934, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Library PCA File (hereafter abbreviated AMPAS PCA File); Joseph Breen to Louis B. Mayer, 30 March 1934, AMPAS PCA File; Minasian, 64.
13. John Trumpbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World: U.S. and European Struggles for Mastery of the Global Film Industry, 1920-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 28; *New York Times* (7 July 1935).
14. Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey,* Vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 309; Donald Everett Webster, *The Turkey of Atatürk: Social Process in the Turkish Reformation* (Philadelphia, PA: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1939), 24, 165, 234; Minasian, 64; Frederick Herron to Joseph Breen, 18 July 1934, AMPAS PCA File.
15. Miller, *Censored Hollywood,* 81-83, 297. For more on the Legion of Decency and the creation of the PCA, see Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
16. *Variety* (3 April 1934); *Variety* (17 July 1934); James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy: The Passing of the Rex* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 70; Ruth Vasey, "Foreign Parts: Hollywood's Global Distribution and the Representation of Ethnicity," *American Quarterly* 44 (December 1992): 618-20.
17. State Department Memorandum, 16 November 1934, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 59—Department of State, Decimal File, 1930-1939 (hereafter abbreviated NARA).
18. Wallace Murray to Will Hays, 19 November 1934, NARA; Frederick Herron to Wallace Murray, 22 November 1934, NARA; Mehmet Münir to Wallace Murray, 6 December 1934, NARA; Robert P. Skinner to Cordell Hull, 8 January 1935, NARA.
19. Emil Lengyel, *Turkey* (New York: Random House, 1941), 400-30; Shaw and Shaw, 375-88.
20. *Hollywood Reporter* (20 April 1935); Mehmet Münir Ertegün to Wallace Murray, 22 April 1935, NARA; Wallace Murray to Frederick Herron, 29 April 1935, NARA; Frederick Herron to Joseph Breen, 29 April 1935, AMPAS PCA File.
21. Frederick Herron to Geoffrey Shurlock, 16 May 1935, AMPAS PCA File; State Department Memorandum, 14 May 1935, NARA; *Hollywood Reporter* (7 May 1935); *Hollywood Reporter* (11 May 1935); *Hollywood Reporter* (26 June 1935).
22. State Department Memorandum, 14 May 1935, NARA; Robert P. Skinner to Cordell Hull, 4 June 1935, NARA.
23. State Department Memorandum, 18 June 1935, NARA; Frederick Herron to Wallace Murray, 24 June 1935, NARA.
24. *New York Times* (7 July 1935); *New York Times* (29 December 1935); Frederick Herron to Joseph Breen, 25 July 1935, AMPAS PCA File; Webster, 193; State Department Memorandum, 5 September 1935, NARA.
25. Minasian, 64; Bob Thomas, *Thalberg: Life and Legend* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), 310; Samuel Marx, *Mayer and Thalberg: The Make-Believe Saints* (New York: Random House, 1975), 245-46; *Motion Picture Herald* (7 December 1935); *Variety* (31 January 1933); *Variety* (29 May 1935); *Variety* (10 July 1935); *Variety* (16 October 1935); *Variety* (16 April 1969).
26. Webster, 281; G. Howland Shaw to Cordell Hull, 10 September 1935, AMPAS PCA File; *La République* (3 September 1935); *La République* (9 September 1935); *Haber* (3 September 1935). Translations of the Turkish newspaper articles appear in the AMPAS PCA File.
27. Minasian, 70; Wallace Murray to Will Hays, 7 September 1935, NARA.

28. Mehmet Münir Ertegün to Wallace Murray, 4 October 1935, NARA; Robert P. Skinner to Cordell Hull, 5 October 1935, NARA; Marx, 247.
29. *Motion Picture Herald* (7 December 1935); Frederick Herron to Wallace Murray, 17 December 1935, AMPAS PCA File; Frederick Herron to Joseph Breen, 19 December 1935, AMPAS PCA File; Joseph Breen to Frederick Herron, 16 December 1935, AMPAS PCA File; Joseph Breen to Executive Secretary, American Red Cross, 9 November 1935, AMPAS PCA File; Joseph Breen to Douglas Griesemer, 23 November 1935, AMPAS PCA File; Val Lewton to Joseph Breen, 8 June 1936, AMPAS PCA File; State Department Memorandum, 17 December 1935, NARA.
30. AMPAS PCA Files for *It Can't Happen Here, Idiot's Delight* (1939), *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (1938), *Blockade* (1938).
31. Frederick Herron to Joseph Breen, 13 January 1939, AMPAS PCA File; State Department Memorandum, 11 January 1939, NARA.
32. State Department Memorandum, 15 December 1938, NARA; State Department Memorandum, 20 December 1938, NARA; Frederick Herron to Joseph Breen, 27 December 1938, AMPAS PCA File; Joseph Breen to Frederick Herron, 3 January 1939, AMPAS PCA File.
33. State Department Memorandum, 11 January 1939, NARA; Frederick Herron to Joseph Breen, 13 January 1939, AMPAS PCA File.
34. Eric Johnson to Joseph Breen, 23 October 1950, AMPAS PCA File; Joseph Breen to Eric Johnson, 26 October 1950, AMPAS PCA File; *Hollywood Reporter* (10 April 1969); *Variety* (16 April 1969).
35. Author interview with Alex Hakobian, 5 August 2004.
36. Ibid.; *Variety* (25 November 1987). The film is available on video.
37. *Hollywood Reporter* (10 July 1989); *Los Angeles Times* (18 November 2002).

DAVID WELKY is an assistant professor of history at the University of Central Arkansas specializing in twentieth-century mass culture, particularly film, mass media, and sports. He is currently working on books about Depression-era culture and Hollywood on the eve of World War II.

ABSTRACT MGM's attempt to film *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh,* Franz Werfel's 1933 best-selling novel about the Turkish genocide of Armenians during World War I, nearly touched off a major international incident and alerted Hollywood to the dangers of dealing with foreign subjects in the ideologically charged era of the Great Depression.

■ ROBIN L. MURRAY AND JOSEPH K. HEUMANN

The First Eco-Disaster Film?

Blazing oil gushers make marvelous cinematographic material . . . only cinema can capture the thick oil stream bursting forth like a fiery monster. Only cinema can display such an awesome inferno in its terrifying beauty and majesty.

—Rahman Badalov[1]

WHEN BERTRAND TAVERNIER claims that an 1896 Lumière Brothers' film, "Oil Wells of Baku: Close View," "may be the first ecological film ever made,"[2] he seems to be reading the footage of burning oil wells from an ecocritical perspective. Indeed, "Oil Wells" invites a reading that centers on environmental concerns because of what look like the devastating effects of drilling for oil. This 36-second "view," shot by Kamill Serf with a stationary camera, shows huge flames and black smoke streaming from burning oil wells in Baku, Azerbaijan—seemingly sure signs of environmental disaster. But disaster seems more like spectacle, which raises interesting issues, and both Serf and the film's viewers serve as spectacle's attentive audience.

The oil wells in the frame look like miniatures until the immensity of the oil derricks is revealed by a human figure moving in front of the center well. This person looks miniscule as he walks away from the center derrick and out of the frame. The extreme long shot accentuates the power of both the tall derricks and the rising flames and smoke, smoke that darkens into the distance from the right side of the frame. Still more smoke seems to come from similar oil well fires offscreen. To the right of the center derrick, as far away as the horizon line, two blazes flame up from what look like vertical pipes. Gray and black smoke flows out of the fires in a plume that covers the sky.

The center derrick serves as the focus of the shot. This derrick is placed inside an enormous pit, which might serve to capture any excess oil flow. A platform connects the derrick to its outside enclosure and to what seems to be a pipeline to transport oil from these interconnected wells. A roofed building serves as the derrick's foundation. In front of the derrick are what look like the frames of new derricks under construction. Vertical pipes that resemble bare trees pop up in every corner of the shot, usually in rows of four or five. A set of wooden stairs leads up to a scaffold on the left side of the center derrick. The second completed derrick sits left of center on flat ground, with no scaffold and only an enclosed building at its bottom. The center derrick, however, sets off the tall derrick to the left and the gray and black smoke to the right. The left derrick hides the source of the fire that bursts out from behind it. This

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fire is just one of three fires in the view: one to the left of center, the other two off screen to the right. Smoke fills the background.

All of this smoke and uncontrolled fire seem to support Tavernier's claim. The fire and smoke look destructive to humans and their environment, signifying humans' rape of the landscape for personal gain—oil taken at any price to the natural world. But the figure walking in front of the derricks suggests another reading. He moves without the urgency an eco-disaster reading would expect. In fact, he walks in front of the derricks and the burning oil fields with an unconcerned gait, as if nothing unusual was happening. We'll see this nonchalance again in two documentary films shot nearly a hundred years later: *Fires of Kuwait* (David Douglas, 1992) and *Lessons of Darkness* (Werner Herzog, 1992). But the Lumières' brief film offers no explanation for the fires, nor does its title: "Oil Wells of Baku: Close View"; it leaves today's viewers—already haunted by recent images of oil and flames—wondering, Is this business as usual, or an eco-disaster? And what does it mean when we view these things as spectacle?

What this film "means" seems to be different now than it was in the late 1890s, at least according to the nonchalant figure in the Lumière Brothers' "View." So what does it say about our concerns about nature —both then and now? When (if ever) does the destruction wrought by gushing oil wells—"monsters," according to historian and travel writer Abraham V. W. Jackson's description of Baku's oil fires—become seen as something other than a "spectacle," "surpassed only by the awful grandeur when fire adds terror to the scene"?[3] When do burning oil wells move beyond spectacle to gain the status of ecological disaster, and when do the costs begin to include not only money and human lives, but also nature? This brief film poses these questions more powerfully than do the earlier photographs, postcards, and narrative descriptions of the Baku fires. What was its message then—and what is it now? What turns disaster into a spectacular image that leaves viewers struck with awe?

Burning oil seems to be seen as disastrous only if it results in great economic losses. Thus there is a space where filmic representations of burning oil wells can become spectacular events rather than ecological disasters. When ecological disasters are caught on film, they provide audiences with a re-creation of the event, yet the possible disastrous effects of that event are obscured by the spectacular screen moments. Tavernier's assertion that "Oil Wells of Baku" "may be the first ecological film ever made" loses its force when read in relation to the spectacle. Unlike the unconcerned figure in that film, however, audiences become transfixed by the fires on display, though not necessarily by their environmental consequences.

Oil production in the region around Baku goes back to the Hammurabi and the Babylonian Dynasty—and so, it seems, do perspectives that see oil well gushers and fires as spectacle. According to historian Sarah Searight, "Baku, on the sandy south-west shore of the Caspian Sea, has been renowned for its oil for some 3000 years." Evidence from Herodotus and Vitruvius demonstrates that crude oil (bitumen) from around Baku was being used as "mortar in the walls of Babylon" and "as a binding agent, mixed with clay." In 700-600 B.C., "oil was being extracted for use in everyday life, both for medicinal purposes and for heating and lighting in homes. 'Fuel oil' was known for being transported from Absheron Peninsula (where Baku is located) to Iran, Iraq, and India." Plutarch talks about oil in northern Iraq as well. But "the oil and gas of the Absheron peninsula, on the southern side of which lies Baku, was sufficiently well known for a Zoroastrian fire temple [a temple built to worship spectacular oil fires] to be built at least 2500 years ago over a gas seepage at Surakhany."[4] The fire temple remained in Baku as late as 1911, when Abraham Jackson published his *The Oil Fields and The Fire Temple of Baku,* a reminder of the oil fires that prompted the temple—and of Jackson's awe at the sight of such a magnificent spectacle as a burning oil well.

Fires of Kuwait

Oil from the Absheron Peninsula provided resources for everyday life in the region, but it also became a source of revenue and prosperity, especially in the late nineteenth century, when the Nobel family of Sweden invested in the region. Under their auspices, the oil fields at Baku flourished. According to an 1882 statement by Ludwig Nobel, "Russia could light all the world, lubricate all the world, and paint all the world."[5] Hazards like heavy smoke from kerosene refineries and gushing oil wells did not decrease overall economic gains for the Nobel family and its allies and, again, were seen more as spectacle than disaster.

Hazards in the oil field, however, translated into environmental damage that seems horrific by today's standards. According to Searight, "when drills reached the deeper strata, violent eruptions of gas, oil and sand were sometimes sent sky high," creating a gusher. "In 1886 a particularly ferocious gusher in Bibi-Eilat, Baku's richest field, is said to have produced more oil in one day than all the rest of the world's wells put together."[6] Gushers spewing out tons of oil were common in late nineteenth-century Baku. And in 1896, the year "Oil Wells at Baku: Close View" was shot, "Another well produced close to 12 million poods (60 million gallons), and engineers could not get it under control for 15 days. Most of the oil flowed into the Caspian Sea because there were no adequate means to contain it."[7] Yet soon after the gusher, oil production, transportation, and refinement increased by thousands of poods, with little concern for the environmental consequences of either oil gushers or fires.

This disregard for environmental consequences continued into the twentieth century. When Jackson visited the oil fields near Baku around 1910, his primary concern regarding oil as pollutant seemed to relate to his clothing. "On all occasions when visiting the petroleum fields it is advisable to wear old clothes," Jackson warns in his book. When wells gush, they "fill . . . the air with a deluging rain from whose greasy downpour there was no escape." In spite of Jackson's warning, he describes each well as "a source of revenue that is a fortune" and uses adjectives like "thrilling" to describe gushing wells. For him, the main problem with gushers relates to loss of revenue: "Sometimes the boring strike 'fountains,' and then a tremendous 'spouter' is the result, belching up its concealed contents with the force of a geyser, and perhaps bringing ruin instead of fortune to its owner unless the giant can be speedily throttled and gagged."[8]

Jackson compares gushers to monsters and geysers, but the description he provides emphasizes their sublime rather than their destructive force. The wells, whether burning or gushing, may seem "awful," but they are mostly seen as a magnificent "spectacle." Although unavailable for viewing, the photographs and film footage from A. Mishon, a French photographer and cinematographer who lived in Baku for 25 years, included footage of some of these oil fields (footage that still exists and was shown in France in 1995, according to Aydin Kazimzada, director of Azerbaijan's Cinema Museum). "From 1879 to 1905 he documented landscapes, episodes from oil extraction, the refining process, as well as the oil gushers' eruptions and terrifying fires that broke out in the oil fields."[9] Writing in 1997 about Mishon's footage of fires in 1898, Kazimzada calls the oil field fires "terrifying," yet the person in "Oil Wells of Baku: Close View" seems unconcerned.

A decade after both the Lumières' and Mishon's oil fire films, environmental damage caused by gushing or burning oil wells was still ignored. Jackson notes attempts made to protect Baku oil derricks (and what he calls their "precious liquid") from fire, but the preservation is based on economic rather than environmental concerns. These pyramidal wooden structures are "covered with gypsolite or iron plating as a protection against fire," to save the oil reserves, "one of the richest articles of commerce," according to Jackson.[10] Yet according to Searight, in spite of these precautions, "The dense forest of tall, wooden oil-soaked derricks resulted in frequent fires, especially since everyone smoked heavily." The only negative consequence of fires and gushers Searight notes is their impact on revenue: "Too many gushers depressed the price of oil, thereby adding to the economic and political fragility of Baku."[11]

One statement regarding the pollution produced by the wells during this period may point to negative ramifications of oil production. British journalist Charles Marvin, writing in the 1880s, explains that in Baku "hung a dense cloud of smoke and long before you reach it you perceive the all-pervading smell of oil, which you will breathe everywhere and taste in everything so long as you remain in Baku."[12] Yet, according to Searight, "Pollution seemed a small price to pay" to have such a bounty from oil production. In 1890, travel writer and historian George Curzon described Baku as "a town of crude and undigested wealth."[13]

Jackson's first description of Baku after entering its "handsome station" at first seems to suggest pollution was viewed in a negative light around 1911: "Oil is in the air one breathes, in one's nostrils, in one's eyes, in the water of the morning bath . . . in one's starched linen—everywhere. . . . The very dust of the streets is impregnated by the petroleum with which they are sprinkled; the soil of the home garden is charged with

Lessons of Darkness

oil; and if flowers are really to thrive, it is said that earth must be imported from Lankuran farther down on the Caspian."[14] But he defends the town's drinking water and connects oil to prosperity in the region rather than to the destruction of the environment. Immediately after what seems like a criticism of the town, he continues, "The busy wheels of commerce that roll out of Baku are lubricated with the native product; the engines and steamers are propelled by it; the coffers of the great petroleum companies are filled with it; and the bourse of the city's exchequer is governed by its rise and fall." Jackson "look[s] back with pleasure to each visit" to Baku, and says he "shall gladly welcome the chance to see this busy metropolis again if another opportunity takes me to the Caspian."[15] Although journalists like Marvin and historians like Jackson do note the pollution produced by the oil wells, Jackson, especially, seems to interpret smoke, dirt, and grease as necessary annoyances that are outweighed by the economic advantages that oil has provided Baku and the Azerbaijan region.

"Oil Wells of Baku: Close View" captures on film the fires noted by Jackson and smoke from burning oil wells described by both Jackson and Marvin. The view also seems to reflect the same perspective on oil production and its consequences—because oil catalyzed an economic boom in the region, pollution and debris were a small price to pay. The Lumières' nonchalant figure acts as if the fire and smoke caught on film is business as usual, the same reaction Jackson seems to have when returning to Baku's oil-covered streets and breathing its smoke-filled air. At least as late as 1911, most Westerners saw burning oil derricks and gushing wells as signs of progress, not ecological disaster.

The 1896 Lumière Brothers' "Close View" seems to be the first film of Baku's oil well fires, but many others followed: "Fire at the Oil Gusher in Bibi-Heybat" (1898), "White City/Black City" (1908), "In the Realm of Oil and Millions" (1916), and "Symphony of Oil" (1933), to name a few, all of which caught oil fires, like flaming monsters, on film.[16] Filmic displays of burning oil seem to highlight their spectacular—if terrifying—effects, even if these fires were shot for purposes other than entertainment. As museum curator Rahman Badalov comments, "blazing oil gushers make marvelous cinematographic material. . . . Only cinema can display such an awesome inferno in its terrifying beauty and majesty."[17]

Documentary and newsreel footage of oil fires during World War II seem to foreground loss of fuel and supplies more than profit. The film series *Battlefront* includes documentary footage that highlights battles won by both the Allies and their enemies from 1939 to 1945. Some of these films show us the frequent oil fires that occurred during the war, from the Allied ships and oil tankers devastated by the Germans in *Commerce Raiders* and *U Boat War* to the German/Rumanian oil fields destroyed by Allied bomber planes in *Bombing of Ploesti.*[18] The fires, even on newsreel film, erupt with the same hot flames (now in color) and black smoke as those in "Oil Wells of Baku." None of these films mentions loss of oil profits because for WWII combatants, oil meant fuel for military vehicles, not money. Even here, however, the spectacular images remain. The flames flaring up from oil tankers and bombed oil fields are both violent and mesmerizing. The footage is shot from above, and looking down on erupting fires distances us from them and enhances their monstrous power.

Although both the oil well fire films from Baku and the documentary footage of exploding oil tankers and fields from WWII seem only to record actual events, they still play on what Nick Browne calls the "rhetoric of the spectacular."[19] Browne claims that "formally, the rhetorical parameters of the spectacular work by modulation of cinematic scale, repetition, and perspective." That is, films of oil well fires take on spectacular dimensions when they are of the large-scale dimensions oil fires produce, when they are shot repeatedly or for a long duration, and when they are shot from an angle that emphasizes their force. According to Browne, the goal of spectacular effects in action films like the *Die Hard* and *Batman* series is to "recreate [a spectacular moment] experientially, namely in a mode that displays the force, that is the physics of the event, but not its meaning." "Oil Wells of Baku" (though hardly an action film) also seems to display the force of the event—burning oil wells—but not its meaning.

Feature films with oil well fires at their center go even further to display the force of fire. *Tulsa* (Stuart Heisler, 1949), a post-WWII film about the Oklahoma oil boom of the 1920s, seems at first to bypass spectacle and foreground the prosperity oil revenues can bring to a region. But after an initial opening that shows us an aerial view of the bustling prosperous city of Tulsa in 1949, the film backtracks to the 1920s conflict between ranchers and oil producers in Oklahoma, a conflict that climaxes in a tremendous oil fire spectacle. The first 1920s scene highlights the damage caused by the exploitation of oil reserves: a stream polluted with oil kills cattle on a ranch owned by Lansing (the father of the film's protagonist, Cherokee), who throws a match in the stream and ignites the oil floating on its top. And when Lansing "trespasses" on his rival Tanner's land to protest his oil production, he is killed running from a spectacular gusher that blows up in a tornado of wood and metal. Both the stream fire and the exploding oil well are shot first in close-up and then from a distance to heighten their force. Yet although *Tulsa*'s opening spectacle seems to foreground pollution, the film's main conflict is in fact between oil producers and cattle ranchers, and not between environmentalists and land exploiters. Lansing originally attacks Tanner not because he polluted the stream, but because the pollution has killed his cattle.

The film's ending outdoes the beginning with an even more spectacular oil fire that, according to film critic Hal Erickson, "must have cost as much as all the other Eagle-Lion releases of 1949 combined."[20] Framing the film's 1920s burning stream opening, the film's Native American lead, Jim Redbird, his cattle lying dead from drinking the poisoned water, lights an oil-laden stream on fire and waves it into flame with his jacket. The ensuing oil field fire blasts into red flames and black smoke that fill nearly half the frame. As in the opening sequence, erupting flames are shot first in close-up and then in a long shot that distances the viewer and adds force to the fire.

Although the film narrative resolves its conflicts in favor of both Native Americans and a balance between ranching and oil production, it is the massive fire scene that sells the film. Even though the film's narrative foregrounds Cherokee and her rise to power as an oil queen, it also enacts a battle between white oil moguls and Native Americans, and between greed and conservation, and it is the film's spectacular ending that resolves both conflicts. Redbird chooses to destroy oil fields that supplant cattle ranches—a choice that, ironically, results in environmental destruction more massive than that caused by drilling oil wells too close together to accommodate cattle. Redbird's action reinforces the film's emphasis on spectacle rather than on environmental devastation. Although events point toward a conservation message, spectacular effects obscure or even erase the meaning of that message.

Oil well fires serve as spectacle for an audience, even when the object is to extinguish the flames. A veteran of WWII, Paul N. "Red" Adair, served as a firefighter controlling oil well fires and blowouts from 1945, when he left the army, until his death in 2004. His expertise contributed to two oil fire films, *Hellfighters*

Tulsa

Hellfighters

(Andrew V. McLaglen, 1968) and *Fires of Kuwait*. Adair served as a consultant for *Hellfighters,* which highlighted a hero like himself—Chance Buckman, played by John Wayne. According to film critic Dan Pavlides, Adair and his assistants "provided excellent and credible information for the film and the pyrotechnic team headed by legendary special-effects expert Fred Knoth."[21] As a consultant, Adair ensured that authentic techniques were used to extinguish oil fires in the film, from Texas to Sumatra to Venezuela. But he also helped authenticate the spectacular effect that flaming oil wells provide.

According to the *Hellfighters* production notes, John Wayne "had his most formidable battle—taking on giant, billowing towers of searing flame." Based on the experiences of Red Adair and his assistants, the film put fire at its center, so that "John Wayne had to take a back seat to explosive pyrotechnic effects."[22] Looking for authenticity, Knoth and his team produced oil well fires with oil and propane—and thereby reproduced some of the same environmental consequences produced by actual oil fires. *Hellfighters*' opening scene is a drilling operation that is "coming in wild."[23] Shot from the point of view of a worker (who is, ironically, smoking a cigarette), the scene looks like documentary footage of a gushing well in extreme long shot. Oil workers struggle to contain the gusher but the whole derrick operation explodes into flames, throwing off gray and black smoke. Fire and smoke fill the frame as burning workers run away from the disaster.

As with the "Oil Wells of Baku," the flames fill the sky with a heavy black smoke. And like the Lumière view, this opening scene is an extreme long shot. Although filmed in Technicolor, the scene from *Hellfighters* looks as dark as "Oil Wells of Baku." Other scenes show flaming oil stifled by courageous firefighters. As McLaglen explains, the special effects also have consequences similar to actual oil well fires. For example, in the final scenes in Venezuela that feature five oil wells rigged for fire by technicians, the explosions produced "tremendous" heat: "I had to bite my tongue every time I sent Duke Wayne into the scene because I knew the heat was almost unbearable. . . . As soon as he went near the fire he started steaming, like a boiled egg." With "geyser[s] of flame 125 feet high" and temperatures so extreme they melted the plastic on the director's chair, the effects replicate the awesome power of an oil well fire.[24] To produce such powerful imagery, special effects engineers burned 350,000 gallons of diesel oil and 60,000 gallons of raw propane.[25]

In 1992, almost a hundred years after the "Oil Wells of Baku: Close View" was produced, the IMAX documentary *Fires of Kuwait* foregrounds the same spectacle—this time for a 50-foot screen. Although it follows a traditional narrative that moves from a problem to a solution and foregrounds firefighters' heroism, the film heightens the effect of monstrous spectacle not only because of the immensity of the Kuwaiti fires, but also because the IMAX format was created to display and reinforce the colossal, the sublime, and the spectacular. *Fires of Kuwait* opens out of blackness broken only by red flames. Red light flickers as the camera tilts down to show the burning flame. It tilts up again and reveals a series of four flaming oil well fires in perspective receding into the distance. Then the film cuts to a second shot of a river of molten burning oil on the ground. A third shot shows oil well fires pushed aside by wind to reveal the sun—which looks like a red moon since the sky is so black. The last shot before the film's title parallels the Lumières' "Close View": the extreme long shot

of a row of burning oil wells that stretches into the distance. The dark smoke nearly fills the screen; the sky goes black; and the title comes up in red: *Fires of Kuwait.*

The film cuts to a map of the Persian Gulf region, and the origin of these flames. The rest of the film exposes the devastation caused by these hundreds of fires and valorizes the clean-up efforts of firefighters from all over the world. *Fires of Kuwait* takes a stand against damaging nature that seems to be based on values other than economic ones. We assert, then, that for David Douglas, the director and cinematographer of *Fires of Kuwait,* and for the firefighters who contain the blaze, oil well fires should be extinguished not only because they waste money but also because they destroy the natural environment and pollute the air and soil. The first 25 minutes of the 34-minute DVD version of *Fires of Kuwait* are taken up with glimpses of fire, black smoke, and firefighting teams stemming the flames. The awesome views of towering flames with enormous plumes of smoke are strengthened by aerial views through the darkness. From a distance, even the sand is black from spilled oil. Only after Red Adair's team snubs the well does the narrator turn to the environmental consequences of the fires and oil spills. He explains that costs to the environment may be "devastating" and "global," so that the firefighters are helping "wildlife" too. The film shows oil-covered desert sands, and the voiceover explains that the "ecosystem is damaged." A black oasis appears on the film, and the narrator tells us "oases are under lakes of oil." Trees are "encrust[ed]" with oil mixed with poison chemicals. "Migrating birds" are lost in "poison air." The water is polluted and the beaches are still strewn with mines.

The devastation is "an environmental assault." But the film ends on a hopeful note: gushers are under control and a blue sky is visible. People work in teams, highlighting the need for cooperation as they extinguish the last of the fires, stop oil gushers, and find and destroy all land mines. To demonstrate the regrowth of the land—and of nature—the last shots show the signs of new life: green leaves grow out of the oil-covered ground in oases.

Fires of Kuwait successfully demonstrates a nation's recovery from a tyrant's vengeful act of eco-terrorism. But the film also relies on a rhetoric of spectacle intensified by the use of the IMAX format, which provides viewers with breathtaking views of the projected images, from all angles and with a three-dimensional effect. The use of documentary footage to create spectacular sequences in *Fires of Kuwait* becomes even more evident when lined up against the cinematography and narrative of Werner Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness.*

Herzog's 1992 film uses images from the same Gulf War and the fires that erupted after it to create a multigenre 54-minute film that is part documentary and part science fiction. The IMAX film gives a straight narrative description of the cause of the fires, the catastrophe that ensues, and the tasks that the firefighters faced while extinguishing over 600 oil fires in only nine months. Herzog, on the other hand, creates a meditation on the nature of the spectacle that he encountered as an "outsider," a "visitor" sensitive to the environmental destruction; he also takes the time to explore intimate details of Kuwaiti citizens who were brutalized by the Iraqi invasion.

In spite of their narrative difference, *Fires of Kuwait* and *Lessons of Darkness* both give us a sense of the scale of the distance between the burning oil wells. They both emphasize the utter darkness caused by smoke from the fires, a smoke so thick the sun is blacked out. The epigraph from Blaise Pascal that opens Herzog's film helps illustrate how devastating fires might take on the role of spectacle: "The collapse of the stellar universe will occur like creation—in grandiose splendor."[26]

Which brings us back to our initial questions about the 1896 view—and about perspectives on oil fires then and now. There is no definitive answer to our first question: Is the fire depicted in "Oil Wells of Baku: Close View" business as usual or an eco-disaster? Although it looks like an eco-disaster to its commentator, Bertrand Tavernier, and, perhaps, to twenty-first-century viewers, to historical observers like Jackson, the fires recorded in the Lumière view and elsewhere in the late 1890s seem typical, if not "natural," and unthreatening.

A second set of questions, however, seems to require a more complex set of answers. The most complex of these questions seems to be: When do burning oil wells gain the status of ecological disaster? When do the costs begin to include not only money and human lives but non-human nature? The answer, though, turns on another question: When does disaster become a spectacular image? In this context, the notion of spectacle obscures or even erases ecological readings.

Neither the rhetoric nor the real pollution in Baku seems to have changed in the century since "Oil Wells of Baku: Close View." The Baku described by Jackson in 1911 looks and feels pretty much the same 70 or 80 years later. As Searight notes: "When arriving by train in the 1980s, one was struck by the grimy desolation of the Bibi-Eilat field on the approach to the city, with its ancient 'nodding donkeys' wearily bringing oil to the surface, and the pipelines leaking over the sandy soil. Black Town was still black; sandstorms and flies were still a blight."[27]

Whether oil fires flame up by accident, as they did in the late 1800s (and still do today), or are deliberately set, as they were during the Gulf War (and still are today—in Columbia and Iraq, for example), their erupting plumes of fire and smoke and gushing rivers of oil still spark the same awed response. Photographs of burning oil wells and pipelines in 1896 and shots of Iraqi pipeline sabotage in 2004 depict the same universal force. *Hellfighters, Lessons of Darkness,* and *Fires of Kuwait*—and countless current and recent films—attest to the continuing popularity of the spectacle. "Oil Wells of Baku: Close View" highlights what looks like a horrific eco-disaster, but the view of oil fires spurting up in 1896 insists first and foremost on the visual. Tucked into a series of Lumière Brothers' views entitled "The Lumière Path" (on the *First Films* DVD), "Oil Wells of Baku: Close View" can be read as an ecological film, an environmental film, and a view of the history of wealth. It also foregrounds a history of spectacle, and the history of one of the most contentious of modern currencies. Images of gushing oil in films like *Giant* and *Oklahoma Crude* and television series like "The Beverly Hillbillies" demonstrate the pervasive power of oil.[28] And contemporary images of oil well and pipeline fires on the covers of newspapers and magazines attest to our continuing appetite for the spectacle oil can produce.

NOTES

1. Rahman Badalov describes the spectacular display oil well gushes and fires provide in "Oil, Revolution and Cinema," *Azerbaijan International*, Autumn 1997 (5.3). www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/53_folder/53_articles/revolution.html.
2. Bertrand Tavernier suggests more in his "Commentary." See Lumière Brothers, "Oil Wells of Baku: Close View," on *Lumière Brothers: First Films*, Kino DVD, 1996.
3. Abraham V. W. Jackson, *From Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2002 [1911]), 40.
4. Sarah Searight provides an effective history of the area around Baku in her "Region of Eternal Fire: Petroleum Industry in Caspian Sea Region," *History Today,* vol. 50, no. 8 (August, 2000): 45-51; see page 46.
5. Quoted in Searight, 47.
6. Ibid.
7. "The Development of the Oil and Gas Industry in Azerbaijan," *AzerMSA,* accessed June 21, 2004. www.members.tripod.com/azmsa/oil.html. This chronology of some of the highlights of Azerbaijan's oil and gas industry stretches from 700 B.C. to the present.
8. Jackson, 40.
9. Aydin Kazimzada, "Celebrating 100 Years in Film, Not 80," *Azerbaijan International,* Autumn 1997 (5.3). www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazines/53_folder/53_articles/53_100years.html.
10. Jackson, 39.
11. Searight, 47.
12. Quoted in Searight, 47.
13. Ibid., 49.
14. Jackson, 25-26.
15. Ibid., 25, 26, 27.
16. Baku oil well film stills can be found in Kazimzada's article, "Celebrating 100 Years in Film, Not 80." Badalov also describes these oil well fire films without noting directors or stating whether or not these films are available.
17. Badalov.
18. WWII film footage can be viewed on the *Battlefront* (WW II) Five Pack DVD. Madacy Entertainment, 2001.
19. Nick Brown, "The Big Bang: The Spectacular Explosion in Contemporary Hollywood," UCLA, www.cinema.ucla.edu/strobe/bigbang1.html.2004.
20. Hal Erickson wrote the review of *Tulsa* for "All Movie Guide" at www.allmovie.com.
21. Dan Pavlides, "*Hellfighters* Review," *All Movie Guide,* accessed June 18, 2004, www.allmovie.com/cg/x.dll.2004; and Rose of Sharon Winter, "*Fires of Kuwait* Review," *All Movie Guide,* accessed June 18, 2004, www.allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll.2004.
22. The *Hellfighters* production notes, found as a DVD insert, provided the details described here.
23. *Hellfighters* production notes.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Anchor Bay DVD.
27. Searight, 48.
28. In addition to films (such as 2005's *Jarhead*), see news articles about oil well fires like the following: Philip Elmer-DeWitt, "A Man-Made Hell on Earth," *Time (*March 18, 1991): 36-7, and Peter Hobbs and Lawrence F. Radke, "Airborned Studies of the Smoke from the Kuwait, Oil Fires," *Science (*May 15, 1992): 987-91. See also Christina Reed, "War in Iraq," *Geotimes* (May 2003), and Andrew Selsky, "U.S. Crew Battles Oil Well Fires Caused by Rebels in Columbia," *Environmental News Network* (August 13, 2003). For an overview of the repercussions of Gulf War fires, see Dalia M. Spektor, "A Review of the Scientific Literature as it Pertains to Gulf War Illnesses," Volume 6, *Oil Well Fires* (New York: Rand, 1998).

JOSEPH K. HEUMANN is a professor of Communication Studies at Eastern Illinois University specializing in Film Studies and currently working in the area of film and eco-criticism.

ROBIN L. MURRAY is an associate professor of English at Eastern Illinois University specializing in film and eco-criticism.

ABSTRACT When Bertrand Tavernier claims that the Lumière Brothers' "Oil Wells of Baku: Close View" "may be the first ecological film ever made," he seems to be reading the spectacular footage of burning oil wells from an eco-critical perspective. This article examines oil well fire films from 1896 to the present, asking how and why environmental disaster becomes spectacle.

FILM REVIEWS

Two Brothers

Director/producer: Jean-Jacques Annaud. Writers: Alain Godard, Annaud. Cinematographer: Jean-Marie Dreujou. Editor: Noelle Boisson. Music: Stephen Warbeck. Universal Pictures.

Some years ago, in the pages of this journal, I demonstrated how easy it is to make glib, meaningless predictions about the career arc of filmmakers. Writing of Jean-Jacques Annaud's *The Bear* (1989), I concluded with these words: "While *The Bear* is inescapably a genre film, Annaud is anything but a genre director, and no doubt his next work will be characteristically exploratory and provocative."[1] History—film history—soon proved part of this statement true, but in a completely unexpected way. *The Bear* was a fictional feature film based on a novel, yet it closely adhered to the conventions of the wildlife film genre, an ostensibly nonfiction form often associated with documentary. Nothing in *The Bear,* however, could have prepared anyone for Annaud's next film, *The Lover* (1991). With its graphic scenes of sexuality, it was greeted by some as an exercise in soft-core, with suggestions of pedophilia. Annaud then rebounded with more commercially minded, star-studded films, including *Wings of Courage* (1995–shot in IMAX-3D), the highly successful *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997), and the ambitious *Enemy at the Gates* (2001).

Yet although *The Lover* was indeed "exploratory and provocative," Annaud's most recent film has tested the assertion that he is "anything but a genre director." For now, 15 years after *The Bear,* he has returned to the wildlife genre with *Two Brothers* (2004), a tale of two tigers in Southeast Asia who embark on a strange (yet strangely familiar) odyssey.

The opening scenes find the brothers enjoying their early cubhood in an idyllic jungle setting, living amid ruins resembling the majestic Angkor Wat temples in Cambodia. Things change, however, when strange, upright-walking creatures appear. From there we follow the plight of the cubs as they are captured, separated, sold, taunted, abused, put on display, and forced to fight for their lives. *Two Brothers* thus offers a critique of blood sports, including the sort of big-game hunting favored by colonial powers less than a century ago. The big-game hunter (Guy Pearce) who has made a career of shooting magnificent animals and who loots treasures from ruins as a sideline, comes to see the senselessness of killing (as did the hunter in *The Bear*). Through close encounters with the animals, he is persuaded to put down his rifle and resolve not to kill again. Along the way, Annaud also exposes the barbaric practice of pitting animals against one another in fights to the death for the amusement of cheering crowds. We are spared the sight of bloodletting here, but it was not so many years ago that Frank Buck staged similar fights —for real—so he could film them for the delight of matinee audiences in Depression-era America.[2]

Yet to say that Annaud has returned to the wildlife genre with *Two Brothers* does not simply mean that he has made another film about animals. Rather, it means he has once again adopted narrative and formal conventions that are closely associated with the wildlife films one sees on television, and that have helped to define a coherent (if unrecognized) film genre for over half a century. This time the budget is bigger than *The Bear*'s, the cast is larger and more recognizable, the set design more elaborate (*The Bear* had hardly any), the dialogue and human characters are allowed to carry more of the story (*The Bear* had little of either), and the story itself is more sprawling and more intricate. Yet the plot underlying both films is still essentially the same.

More important, however, is the fact that the plot elements belong to a standard wildlife-film story line in which the "story" of an entire species is told through a narrative centered on one character. Often this takes the form of a year-in-the-life account that reflects the cycles of nature while still being an intimate portrait of an individual. The story of the coming-of-age experience and the journey from infancy to parenthood (which is often a physical journey across great distances) concludes with the birth of the next generation—or some sign that the cycle will begin anew. The cyclical aspect thus allows for narrative closure that is conventional, yet seems natural. This model welds together animal imagery, behavioral revelation, and traditional narrative in a single unified structure. To the extent that it is reflected in *Two Brothers,* it is fair to say that Annaud's film illustrates the "classic model" of wildlife film storytelling.

This can be traced back to Disney's animal narrative tales, beginning with *Perri* (1957)—described as "the biography of a squirrel"[3]—and continuing through the 1960s with titles such as *Chico, the Misunderstood Coyote* (1961), *Yellowstone Cubs* (1963), *The Incredible Journey* (1963), *The Legend of Lobo* (1963), *Flash, the Teenage Otter* (1964), *Charlie the Lonesome Cougar* (1968), and perhaps a dozen or so others. It can be seen

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Two Brothers—young cubs

to a lesser extent, although just as clearly, in Disney's earlier series of True-Life Adventures from the 1950s. One can also find it, in varying degrees, in many Hollywood films dealing with animals, including *Babe* (1995), *The Great Panda Adventure* (1995), *Homeward Bound* (1993), *The Adventures of Milo and Otis* (1986), *Born Free* (1966), and in such rare gems as *Sequoia* (1934), *Rango* (1931), and the silent *Nomads of the North* (1920).[4]

It would be wrong to assume, however, that with *Two Brothers,* Annaud is merely revisiting an anachronism. One need only turn on the television to find the same narrative model in wildlife films produced by National Geographic, the BBC Natural History Unit, and other sources of what are often regarded as science-based "nature documentaries." Moreover, it would be just as wrong to see the narrative model underlying *Two Brothers* as the exclusive province of wildlife films, or even of popular film and television generally. Indeed, what has made it so effective and enduring in popular culture is the fact that its foundations rest firmly in the soil of the literary tradition of the Romance, and even deeper in the bedrock of heroic quest myths. Its basic structure is therefore so familiar as to be almost invisible, allowing it to serve as a framework for stories that appear on the surface to be very different from one another, but that are nonetheless linked by their narrative deep structures. In this respect, *Two Brothers* is, ultimately, just like *Dumbo* (1941) and *Bambi* (1942), not to mention countless live-action (and "non-fiction") wildlife films made in the years in between.

What shape, then, does this narrative model take, and how is it evident in Annaud's and other seemingly diverse films? In his famous proto-structuralist study, *The Anatomy of Criticism,* Northrop Frye observed that at its essence the narrative of the literary Romance has three stages: "the perilous journey . . . the crucial struggle . . . and the exaltation of the hero."[5] In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* Joseph Campbell put it even more succinctly, describing the continually recurring monomythic narrative as "a magnification of the formula represented in rites of passage: *separation—initiation—return*."[6] Annaud has acknowledged his story's debt to literary tradition,[7] but it is hard to think of a big-budget mainstream production from recent years that, when distilled to its essence, is a purer evocation of these overlapping formulas than *Two Brothers.*

The theme of the journey is obviously central to such stories. Less noticed, perhaps, but no less essential is the recurrent orphan motif. Who can forget the wrenching scene in which Dumbo is separated from his mother before setting out on his journey of discovery? Or the senseless killing of Bambi's mother by faceless hunters which propels him to his destiny? In *The Bear* it is the mother's death in the first reel that sets the cub on his journey. Indeed, in story after story, it is the separation from, or loss of, the parents (or human surrogates) that precipitates the journey and initiation of the main

As a truck hauls one brother away, we see the other's reaction. "You cannot use just any shot of him," Annaud argues. "There must be the appropriate expression on his face."

animal character(s), and thus provides the very basis for the story itself. This is true in nearly all of the titles mentioned above, but is especially noteworthy in those that were produced in the decades before the wildlife film genre crystallized.

The orphan device does have a basis in biological reality. Mothers in many mammal species do spurn or banish their young at some point to make room for the next generation. This sets many young animals on their way in search of their own territory, potential mating partners, and, of course, new food sources. Television wildlife films have been better about explaining how and why young animals undergo separation from their parents, and about putting this phenomenon in its proper behavioral context. More often than not, it has nothing to do with human hunters, as in *Two Brothers,* or with sudden, tragic occurrences (such as the avalanche in *The Bear*). Although they explain it, wildlife films have been no less eager to exploit the orphan motif for narrative and dramatic purposes, and above all for promoting audiences' emotional involvement with the characters and story.

As the title of *Two Brothers* hints, the classic orphan narrative model of wildlife films is doubled here. The

film is, after all, about twins. Not only are there two young animals with parallel stories (as opposed to the lone cub in *The Bear*), but each is effectively orphaned twice—once when separated from the parents, and again, when separated from the benevolent humans who adopted them as cubs. One cub is even separated from its mother twice—the second time after she fails in a dramatic attempt to rescue it from its human captors (a remarkable scene involving a tiger leaping onto a moving truck). There are even two tigers shot through the ear by hunters, and two dramatic leaps through flames. Yet even as the story follows the brothers along two very different "perilous journeys," the parallel editing subtly assures the audience that they will eventually converge. When the inevitable reunion scenes occur, they too are doubled—both within the tiger family, and with each brother's human surrogate parents. Indeed, nearly every emotional scene of separation (and there are several of these) is ultimately resolved in an equally emotional scene of reunion. In this way, the story continually loops back on itself, systematically picking up all its loose ends until the final "exaltation of the hero[es]."

Sad episodes of cubs being separated from their parents are not, however, the only way in which *Two Brothers* engages audience sympathies. With animals in the lead roles, and often with multiple animal actors playing a single role (reportedly, each brother was played by nine different tigers),[8] the challenge of getting audiences to identify emotionally with them might seem greater than it would be with human actors, especially well-known ones. But it really isn't. "Non-fiction" wildlife films rely on formal devices used in mainstream narrative cinema for story construction and for positioning viewers at the optimal point for conveying the emotion of a scene. Editing devices such as shot/reverse-shot, cuts-on-glances (the "look-off"), point-of-view shots, reaction shots, eyeline matches, and so on, as well as contrived musical cues, are nearly as common in wildlife films as in Hollywood productions. The emphasis over the years has not been on the sort of Zapruder-esque roughness that would be a guarantor of authenticity in a documentary (and of which there is no shortage in Herzog's recent *Grizzly Man*). Instead, the emphasis in mainstream wildlife films has been on seamless continuity, so-called invisible editing, and smooth storytelling.[9] "Shoot for editing" is what aspiring wildlife camerapersons are told. Yet even a lucky capture on film of a sudden, dramatic chase and kill, shot from a distance, can be integrated into a conventionally edited scene by backfilming the necessary reverse-angles, cutaways, etc.—often at a zoo with other animals who will hold still for the camera.

The key element in all of this, however, and the one on which Annaud relies so heavily in *Two Brothers,* is one that sets this type of filmmaking clearly apart from the real experience we might have of animals in the wild: close-ups. Any film today would seem dull without them, but wildlife filmmakers have never really admitted that by relying so heavily on close-ups (and on the long lenses that make them possible), they are depicting wildlife in a highly artificial way—indeed, one in which even they rarely experience it themselves (except through the viewfinder). In this sense, wildlife films do not aim to recreate the experience of nature—which is generally uneventful, with animals viewed at a distance if at all—but to create it with the camera (at least since the 1920s, when long lenses came into general use) and creative editing. Given this constructed quality and their emphasis on drama and entertainment, wildlife films have always been more cinematic than scientific.

What Annaud relies heavily on in *Two Brothers,* however, is close-ups of faces, with their presumed ability to reveal a character's thoughts and feelings. He contends, "You can identify with the animals and know what they think just by looking at their eyes," and "you can so easily read in their eyes what they see, what they feel, what they want."[10] There are two different ideas expressed here. The first is that facial close-ups somehow have the power of psychological revelation—a notion often linked to Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs, who argued that the psychological drama must be the cinema's "proper form" because its most expressive device, the facial close-up, reveals so much about emotion and character psychology.[11] Yet we know from Kuleshov that attributing hunger, grief, or love to a facial close-up is more often the result of the shots preceding and following it. Findings elsewhere suggest that close-ups of facial expressions can be very difficult to interpret when seen out of their original context. Animal faces, moreover, would seem even more of a challenge, for obvious reasons. Annaud offers this example to illustrate his contention:

> If I write: "The tiger is roaming in the forest, hears a noise, climbs on a rock, sees in the distance creatures he's never seen," do I need words? Does the tiger need to say, "Oh, dear, this is a strange noise that I'm hearing. What are those creatures?" No; I just need a little zoom on the eyes and the two ears twitching. And you get it.[12]

And he's right—we do. But the tiger in the close-up need not actually have been seeing or reacting to any strange creatures in the distance. More than likely it is looking at its trainer, who would be standing just off-camera giving hand cues. But when juxtaposed with a long shot depicting strange creatures in the distance, the close-up becomes a curious look, and/or a nervous reaction.

Annaud is also right, however, in insisting that close-ups of faces, even tigers' faces, are not completely neutral:

> I realized that I could not use just any close-up of a tiger looking in a certain direction—even if it is the right direction. It also had to have the right expression for the scene. . . . Much like a human actor, you cannot use just any shot of him looking right or left. There must be the appropriate expression on his face.[13]

Throughout *Two Brothers,* Annaud and his crew seem to get the right expression for each scene. The results are remarkable, and knowing how they were achieved does little to diminish their emotional power.

The second idea expressed in Annaud's comments on close-ups is that of identification—promoting viewers' empathy and emotional involvement with the characters. "I love to identify with animals," he has said, adding,

> I regret that not many movies or books tell the stories from the point of view of the animal in a serious and entertaining way. In a documentary, you learn facts, but you may not really understand why an animal acts as it does. I am trying to give the audience a new way of looking at animals.[14]

Apparently, Annaud has not been watching wildlife films closely. In them, the animal's point-of-view is as common as music and narration. Even if *Two Brothers* doesn't tell its entire story from the animals' point-of-view in the way that, say, *Murder, My Sweet* (1944) shows us basically only what Marlowe sees, or the way *Apocalypse Now* (1979) confines itself almost exclusively to the perspective of Captain Willard, the basic technique—if you take away the first-person narration—is still the same: show a close-up of a character's face, cut to what he is supposed to see, then cut back to the close-up. To heighten tension, repeat several times, increasing shot tightness. It makes little difference that the face is that of an animal. That is why point-of-view editing is employed so extensively in wildlife films. It is hard to imagine that Annaud could really have missed it. How else would one create such a sense of peril and drama when the impala catches sight of the lioness slowly creeping closer?

Annaud has not, therefore, really given his audience a "new way of looking at animals." Rather, he has taken an existing model and given it a more lavish and painstaking treatment, leaving little doubt as to his brilliance at this type of filmmaking. But he is by no means its sole practitioner. Wildlife filmmakers have for many decades taken advantage of habituated animals to achieve results similar to Annaud's. This can be seen, for example, in the highly regarded (for their scientific content) films of Hugo Van Lawick which depict the Gombe chimpanzees studied by Jane Goodall—perhaps most notably *People of the Forest* (1989). The fact that the lines are blurred between habituated, tame, and trained animals makes it possible to include Annaud's *The Bear* in the same category as such films.

But what of *Two Brothers,* with its tighter scripting, its impressive animal stunts, and its scenes of broad, physical comedy (recalling Disney's *Yellowstone Cubs*)? Take these elements out, along with Guy Pearce and the other human actors, and the scenes of the tigers that remain might well be indistinguishable from a 52-minute "blue chip" wildlife film produced by the BBC or National Geographic.[15] This is because filming in fenced enclosures with constructed sets and controlled lighting, shooting multiple takes from a script or storyboard, adding sound effects created later in a studio, and using multiple animal actors who are habituated to humans, are not the things that set *Two Brothers* apart from wildlife films; rather, they are among the elements it has in common with them.

Does this mean Annaud's film could herald the return of wildlife content to the big screen, where it once flourished? Likely not, and here is a suggestion as to why: the classic model illustrated by *Two Brothers,* being so thoroughly narrative- and character-driven, has proved ideally suited to television, which relies so heavily on close-ups. Viewers may simply not want to pay to see on the big screen what they can see on TV, as the failure of Van Lawick's *The Leopard Son,* a beautifully shot and produced tale, proved in 1996.

There has, however, been a gradual return of audience-pleasing wildlife films to the big screen in the large-format (IMAX) market, and a recent series of French films—*Microcosmos* (1996), *Winged Migration* (2001), and *March of the Penguins* (2005)—has proved very popular. Their surprising success may lie in the

The animal's point of view: that we see what the tiger sees is made especially clear here by the meticulous, matching placement of foreground twigs.

fact that they are simply less dependent on narrative and character development than *Two Brothers,* and focus more on the sheer spectacle that only the big screen can deliver. *Penguins* has, of course, also been praised for its moving, dramatic vignettes of pair-bonding and the rearing of young, which made it the darling of the "family values" Christian right. In this respect, it calls to mind an earlier film about penguins, Cherry Kearton's *Dassan,* which ends with the line, "I have learned a great deal from the penguins—about human nature." The year? 1930. But of course *March of the Penguins*'s real antecedents in combining spectacle with anthropomorphic commentary are Disney's True-Life Adventures, especially *White Wilderness* (1958). As such, *March of the Penguins* may be an even better illustration than *Two Brothers* of the principle of "so-old-it's-new."

One last point needs to be made about *Two Brothers*. It involves a common fallacy that has also found its way into the discussion of *March of the Penguins* and *Grizzly Man*: the presumed power of films to effect social change—specifically, environmental and wildlife conservation. It is an article of faith among wildlife filmmakers that their films are helping to save nature, but the evidence for this has never been more than anecdotal.

There is little evidence to suggest that wildlife films make a significant contribution to preserving species or habitat in the kind of systematic or predictable way that would prove them reliable and effective tools. Some films may indeed hit; most miss. Yet, who knows? It may be that Annaud's "quest to bring people closer to tigers,"[16] and his genius for fostering audiences' emotional involvement with them, may indeed stimulate action on their behalf. "Conservation is very close to my heart," Annaud writes. "It is my hope that this film will raise the consciousness of audiences to the issue of protecting habitat for tigers and other creatures."[17] It is a hope we should all share.

NOTES

1. Derek Bousé, "The Bear," *Film Quarterly,* vol. 43, no. 3 (Spring, 1990): 30-34.
2. Buck's films include *Bring 'em Back Alive* (1932), *Wild Cargo* (1934), *Fang and Claw* (1935), *Jungle Cavalcade* (1941), and *Jacare, Killer of the Amazon* (1943). For a description of some of the animal fights he staged in which the animals' terror is often plainly evident, see my *Wildlife Films* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 54-56.
3. The notion of an "animal biography" is often associated with the late nineteenth-century novels of Ernest Thompson Seton. His stories, along with those of Charles G. D. Roberts, and even Jack London, set the pattern—and more importantly created the market—that would later be followed by wildlife films.
4. *Sequoia* (a.k.a. *Malibu*) was based on a 1931 novel by Vance J. Hoyt. The story involves two orphans, a deer and a mountain lion, raised together as friends. The film contains some remarkable footage of their interactions. *Rango* (1931), about a young orangutan, was made by Ernest B. Schoedsack as an independent project apart from his collaborations with Merian C. Cooper, with whom he worked on *Grass* (1925) and *Chang* (1927). *Nomads of the North* (1920) was, like Annaud's *The Bear,* based on a novel by James Oliver Curwood. It is notable today for its cast, which featured Lon Chaney and Lewis Stone. Curwood's story was filmed again by Disney as *Nikki, Wild Dog of the North* (1961).
5. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), 186-87.
6. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 30 (emphasis in original).
7. Annaud's statements, in which he links the film to "fables" and "children's tales," come from a glossy promotional book entitled *Two Brothers: A Fable on Film and How It Was Told* (New York: Newmarket, 2004). Yet attribution here is problematic; the book credits Annaud himself as the author, yet much of it is written in the third person, as if by another writer who frequently quotes Annaud. On the orphan motif, the book reminds us that "many tales feature a young hero who is orphaned or abducted into a strange, cruel environment" (21). Are these Annaud's words, or those of someone else writing about him and his film? It's not clear. The book's fine print lists Amanda Brand as "contributing writer."
8. *Two Brothers: A Fable on Film*, 74. The film's head trainer, Thierry Le Portier, reports that overall 30 tigers were used in the film (84). The technique of constructing characters by composite is a time-honored convention of wildlife film, but is almost unique to the genre, and surely sets it apart from documentary.
9. This is mainly to make wildlife films marketable alongside mainstream films and programs in the competition for ratings and audiences. Historically, it also served to banish the specter of amateurism that haunted early wildlife filmmakers.
10. *Two Brothers: A Fable on Film,* 15, 18.
11. Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film,* trans. Edith Bone (New York: Dover, 1970).
12. *Two Brothers: A Fable on Film,* 15.
13. Ibid., 18.
14. Ibid., 24.
15. For a definition, discussion, and analysis of "blue chip" wildlife films, see my *Wildlife Films,* esp. 14-15.
16. *Two Brothers: A Fable on Film,* 47.
17. Ibid., 43.

DEREK BOUSÉ is the author of *Wildlife Films* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

ABSTRACT This review of Jean-Jacques Annaud's 2004 tale about a pair of tiger cubs in Southeast Asia details the film's formal and narrative similarities to the supposedly "non-fiction" wildlife films on nightly television. Despite working within the boundaries of formula (outlined here), Annaud's execution is nevertheless brilliant and moving.

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9 Songs

Director/writer: Michael Winterbottom. Producers: Andrew Eaton, Winterbottom, Melissa Parmenter. Cinematographer: Marcel Zyskind. Tartan U.S.A.

When asked if *9 Songs* (2004) was the most sexually explicit film ever to be made in mainstream British cinema, director Michael Winterbottom agreed that it probably was, pausing only to add that there was "not an awful lot of competition"for that accolade.[1] In a national cinema not traditionally renowned for its sexual candor, the stiff upper lip has tended to triumph over the stiff anything else. There are notable exceptions, of course, such as the films of Nicolas Roeg, Ken Russell, and Derek Jarman, but it is telling that the quintessential British film romance, *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945), is notable for the absence of sexual consummation, with its lovelorn protagonists exercising restraint in the face of desire. Exactly the reverse is true of the young lovers Matt (Kieran O'Brien) and Lisa (Margo Stilley) in *9 Songs*. In fact, we see them do very little else but make love, in a variety of positions and locations, during the course of a film with a puckishly apt running time of 69 minutes.

It's not that their rapport with each other is exclusively sexual; it's more that the film is enacting a formal experiment, attempting to trace the progress of a relationship through one aspect alone—their sex life. The only other aspect of Matt and Lisa's life together that the film shows us is their frequent concertgoing. During the course of their relationship, the couple attends nine gigs, and footage of their lovemaking is interspersed with footage of nine songs from these concerts, hence the film's title. We never actually see the couple's first meeting. Instead, we move straight to their first sexual encounter: the "meet cute" of traditional cinematic romance has been replaced by the "meat shot" of hardcore pornography.

Unsurprisingly, this explicit sexuality is what has aroused the greatest controversy over the film. Its bold narrative technique and its exhilarating choice of music are overshadowed by the fact that its sex acts are real, not simulated—as is made evident from the first sex scene, where the camera focuses in on penetration, providing proof of the "reality" of what we are witnessing. Because of this, the film only narrowly missed an "18R" (restricted) certificate in the U.K., which would have meant it could only have been shown to over-18s in specially designated "adult" venues. An "18" certificate was finally decided upon, which allowed the film to go

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on general release. Sue Clarke, of the British Board of Film Classification, explained why: "It was a question of intent. The intent of a sex film is sexual arousal. That is not the intention behind this film."[2] Like the Miller Test in U.S. jurisprudence, which decides if a work is obscene or not by assessing whether it appeals to "prurient interest," whether it is "patently offensive," and whether it lacks "serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value," the BBFC seems to think perceived artistic merit allows a film to transcend accusations of being nothing but sex for sex's sake. Michael Winterbottom's respectable reputation, forged by winning numerous international awards for films such as *In This World* (2002) and *24 Hour Party People* (2002), not to mention his forays into the prestigious cultural field of literary adaptation with his Thomas Hardy-based films *Jude* (1996) and *The Claim* (2000), helps to give him greater cultural capital than the run-of-the-mill pornographer. Furthermore, as if to help the film's drive for respectability, British film critics have been keen to show just how profoundly un-arousing (and indeed deeply tedious) they found the film, with the *Daily Mail*'s Patrick Marmion even professing his preference for that most English of experiences, "a nice cup of tea." The *Guardian*'s film critic, Peter Bradshaw, has commented humorously on the spectacle of "a chorus of pundits ostentatiously stifling their yawns in print," asking if those who dismissed the film were being entirely honest with themselves and their readers: "Boring? Gosh, really? Is that why all those male journalists in the audience were gulping and surreptitiously recrossing their legs? Because they thought it was boring?"

Strangely enough, one could argue that it is precisely the apparent tedium and meandering plotlessness of *9 Songs* that make it so remarkable and new. Explicit sexual depiction in film has customarily been aligned with extreme situations, from *In the Realm of the Senses*' (Nagisa Oshima, 1976) story of sexual obsession resulting in mutilation and death, to the murderous rampage of a sex worker and a rape victim in the more recent *Baise-moi* (Virginie Despentes, 2000). By sharp contrast, *9 Songs*' Matt and Lisa are fairly average people who have fairly average sex. There are no wildly outrageous sex acts showcased here; what we see would be described by most people as "vanilla" sex—nothing fancy, but nice all the same. They're in a monogamous (as far as we know, anyway) relationship. And they use condoms, foregrounding an aspect of sexual life that doesn't often make an appearance in either porn or mainstream representations of sex. This last point reminds us that one of the animating forces behind the film is a desire to claim the realistic depiction of explicit sexual activity for "normal" films, and not leave it to the ludicrous posturing of much pornography. Sex may be ubiquitous in contemporary Western media culture, with hardcore pornography now easily available at the click of a mouse, but conversely, the kind of normal sex (this last phrase is advisedly in invisible quotation marks) that the majority of people have is almost culturally invisible. *9 Songs* counters this by focusing on the average sex life of an ordinary couple (although both are slender, attractive, and in the first flush of young love—so they're not that ordinary).

The whole project proceeds from the question Winterbottom asks, adopting a position of studied artlessness akin to the little boy pointing out the emperor's nakedness: "Why can't you make a film showing two people making love? If you're going to make a love story, why do you have to avoid the sexual side?" His immediate point of comparison was contemporary fiction, after having read Michel Houellebecq's sexually explicit novel *Platform*: "Books can deal with sex in the same way they deal with any other aspect of a relationship, but films just skip over it because everyone knows it's fake and therefore not really worth engaging with."[3] But whereas the novelist describes graphic sexual encounters which are then given substance by the reader's imagination, the filmmaker has to show the sex, enacting it with real people.

Winterbottom has tried to underplay the significance of staging real sexual activity for the cameras, describing it as just another kind of acting ("It was surprisingly like making any other film once we got used to it; no more or less voyeuristic. If you're making a movie, you're often asking people to be naked in bed together, to cry or be violent; for difficult and revealing things. It's a weird situation, but making films is weird"[4]), and the argument holds, up to a point. The film does not merely record Stilley and O'Brien having sex, but constructs elaborate sequences in which their characters appear to have particular kinds of sex, using both the actors' performance and the techniques of film editing. But can an actor ever really "act" an erection or an ejaculation (both of which are shown on screen)? Surely these acts go beyond performance and into the realms of incontrovertible physical reality. They are guarantors of the authenticity of sexual pleasure (at least for the man), which is why they are central to hardcore pornography. In this way, the film adheres to what Linda Williams has described, in the subtitle of her book *Hardcore*, as "the frenzy of the visible" in hardcore pornography—the desire to make sexual pleasure yield up its mysteries in some tangible visual form.[5]

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9 Songs—humdrum aspects of a relationship

One of the more interesting details of *9 Songs* is the fact that Matt is a climate scientist whose work takes him to Antarctica. The film's framing narrative, in which Matt introduces the story of his love affair with Lisa, takes place among those sublime icy wastes. Antarctica's featureless landscape is described by Lisa as "an exercise in reductionism," a phrase that is equally apposite as a description of the film itself. Speaking of his motive for making *9 Songs*, Winterbottom has talked about what he feels are the inadequacies of the usual cinematic depictions of love: "I think films that tell a love story tend to rely on a lot of narrative that doesn't have anything to do with being in love. In a way, being in love doesn't have much narrative; if you think about love poems and love songs, they're much more successful at capturing what it feels like to be in love because they're not so concerned with narrative."[6] His approach is to jettison all that and get to the heart of what we really remember about a past love affair: the rush of physical intimacy and the music that we were listening to at the time—the melodies that "haunt our reverie" and transport us back to the past. The film is thus dominated by the presence of these two ordinary forms of transcendence from the everyday—sex and music—as a means of getting to the quintessence of love.

That is not to say that the humdrum aspects of the relationship fail to make any appearance in the film. For example, Matt and Lisa argue about the fact that he mistakenly puts sugar in her tea; they jokily discuss how people from different nations dance in different ways; and Lisa tells Matt his new sunglasses make him look stupid. But interludes like these are subsidiary to the film's main concerns. Nonetheless, one could argue that the very scarcity of these ordinary domestic moments in *9 Songs* makes them all the more fascinating; given such slim narrative pickings, we are encouraged to scan every fleeting moment away from the two familiar sites of bed or concert venue for signs and signals, trying to divine the fortunes of the relationship through the smallest nuances of conversation and gesture. Some might criticize the film's "exercise in reductionism" for its narrow focus on lovemaking and music (a relationship should perhaps be about more than just sex and a compilation CD), but an interesting side effect of this minimalist approach is that it makes the viewer all the more attentive to the potential meaning of the details that are glimpsed in the margins.

One key aspect of *9 Songs* is the decision to tell the story from Matt's perspective, with his retrospective voiceover narration linking different sections of the film. Recounting events from his point of view inevitably affects the camera's focus. Much more time is spent scanning Margo Stilley's naked body than Kieran O'Brien's (although *9 Songs* is much more equitable than a film like *Basic Instinct* in the gender politics of its nudity) because, as Winterbottom points out, "It's inevitable that you look back more on your other half" than on yourself.[7] However, the exploration of Lisa's body at the expense of Lisa's mind or motivation (we may not know much about Matt but we know considerably more about him than we ever find out about Lisa) creates a strange imbalance in the film. In the absence of any knowledge about other aspects of her life, Lisa becomes an enigmatic figure. She never invites Matt back to her place; she disappears off home without much warning; she is the more argumentative of the two, but she is never given any forum to explain why. Matt's voiceover states at the beginning: "When I remember Lisa, I don't think about her clothes, or her work, where she was from, or even what she said." Unfortunately that doesn't leave much of Lisa *except* her sexuality.

In the process of trying to get to the truth of love by removing all extraneous quotidian details, the film deprives Lisa of a living, speaking, separate existence. Like the opening sequences of *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996), which compare the undulating desert dunes to the contours of the female body, the beginning of *9 Songs* visually links Lisa to the topography of Antarctica, with repeated intercutting between Matt's plane flying over the polar landscape and his hand roving over her naked body, and between the peak of her breast and the summit of an iceberg, juxtaposing freezing ice with warm flesh. By linking a single female body and a continent often characterized as "virgin," the sequence enacts and celebrates Matt's twin colonization

of the woman and of the land, both characterized as passive recipients of his attention. Matt's voiceover description of Lisa as "twenty-one, egotistical, beautiful, careless, and crazy" cements the idea that we may have entered the realm of tiresome male fantasy: the familiar *Betty Blue* (Jean-Jacques Beineix, 1986) trope, in which a repressed man is liberated by a sexy, mysterious, and slightly mad free spirit who turns his life upside down. Judging from what we are shown in *9 Songs*, Lisa is remembered by Matt not as a complete person with any kind of cerebral life, but as a near silent sexual cipher, and a clichéd one to boot. If this really is the quintessence of love, then it's rather dispiriting.

9 Songs also expresses a rather ambivalent attitude toward Lisa's sexual desire. A shot repeated throughout the film is a close-up of her open, desiring mouth; in fact the longest sequence in the film has her eyes covered by a blindfold and the mouth shot from upside down (the chin at the top of the screen), abstracting and depersonalizing her remaining visible facial features. Matt is never shot in this way. Lisa's mouth is desirous, but it could also be seen as threatening—greedy, grasping, devouring, ravenous, always coming nearer to the camera—an all-engulfing orifice worthy of a David Cronenberg film. The open mouth seems to connote her unsatisfied sexual desire, something supported by certain details of the narrative: for example, when the couple goes to a strip club, she is more interested in the lap-dancers than Matt, and stays on there after he has gone home. In this respect, Lisa is not that far away from the nymphomaniac played by Marilyn Chambers in the hardcore film *Insatiable* (Stu Segall Daniels, 1980), the woman who is never sexually satisfied, who endlessly cries out for "more, more, more." The most interesting scene in *9 Songs* that speaks to female sexual hunger comes near the end of the film, when Matt interrupts Lisa masturbating with a vibrator. She does not stop or ask him to join her, but stares blankly at him before continuing. Wantonly sucking her finger, Lisa suggests some of the same childishness and self-absorption as Carroll Baker in *Baby Doll* (Elia Kazan, 1956). The music accompanying the scene (Michael Nyman's faltering piano) is sad and elegiac; Lisa even sheds a few tears afterwards.

One can't help wondering what on earth the film is trying to say here. That this is the beginning of the end of this relationship because the woman has spurned her man and turned to technology as a means of satisfaction? And look, it hasn't made her happy either (not like a proper man would)! The details of the sequence imply a rather old-fashioned and uneasy attitude toward female masturbation. Some taboos about sex are clearly

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9 Songs—a day at the beach

easier to break than others, and the idea that a woman might enjoy some degree of sexual autonomy is one of the more enduring shibboleths. Unlike other sex acts in the film, female masturbation has to be burdened with narrative significance—it is made to "mean" the end of the road for the couple. However, this unease is seasoned with a dash of prurient fascination: the camera stays on Lisa throughout the act. Furthermore, the image that has been used to advertise the film is taken from this scene, showing Lisa alone in the throws of self-induced ecstasy.

While *9 Songs* is bracingly radical in some respects, in others it feels surprisingly retrograde. Lisa's sexuality is not for herself but for others, and her masturbation only has positive meaning as an alluring spectacle. The endurance of a double standard in attitudes to male and female sexuality is evident not only in the conditions of the film's production, but also in its reception: it's sad and altogether predictable that while Margo Stilley has been subject to lurid speculation and several kiss-and-tell exposés in the British tabloid press from former boyfriends, as well as considerable media interest when she initially wished to remain anonymous rather than have her name put on the film's credits, Kieran O'Brien has received hardly any attention at all.

While *9 Songs* is a bold, brave (particularly for the actors) experiment in telling the truth about erotic love, Winterbottom's rather faux-naïf stance of liberality and openness should be challenged with some more critical perspectives. I was reminded of George Steiner's argument that the liberalization of sexual depiction brings with it not freedom but "a new servitude": "Sexual relations are, or should be, one of the citadels of privacy. . . .

[Pornographers] subvert this last, vital privacy; they do our imagining for us." He concludes pessimistically that "we have scarcely begun to understand the impoverishment of our imaginings, the erosion into generalized banality of our resources of individual erotic representation and expression. This erosion is very directly a part of the reduction of privacy and individual style in a mass consumer civilization. Where everything can be said with a shout, less and less can be said in a low voice."[8] It is possible to see how a film like *9 Songs,* in spite of its laudable aims to reclaim sex from porn, might inadvertently contribute to the wholesale destruction of privacy in modern life that Steiner predicts.

Currently, most mainstream movie sex is a cliché. As film critic Antony Lane has argued, "An alien watching modern movies would think that human intercourse consisted of nothing more than two faces approaching and docking in horizontal silhouette," such is the predictability of the "lumpen grammar of the traditional Hollywood lay."[9] But at least we all know that we're watching a cliché. Of course, real life and real sex aren't like that. But one could argue that it is precisely this obvious credibility gap between our lives and the movies when it comes to sex that gives us room to do our own thing without worrying about whether we adhere to the accepted template. But if "moviesex'"and "realsex" move closer together in the name of greater verisimilitude, then that precious little piece of remaining unrepresented space is taken away. Perhaps we're not that far away from realizing crossover porn/art-film star Rocco Siffredi's dream that one day in a film "a really big star like Julia Roberts will give a really good blow job to a really great actor like Harvey Keitel" and it won't be a big deal.[10] But is this really a great leap forward for screen performance, or is it a step backward to the days when the profession of actress was synonymous with whore?

But perhaps this is to imbue a low-budget art film like *9 Songs* with an apocalyptic power that it simply doesn't possess. Except among the very prudish, the film is more likely to elicit a shrug of the shoulders than hands thrown up in horror. One gets the feeling that *9 Songs* is more of an *amuse-bouche* for Winterbottom, a palate cleanser between more substantial courses such as his adaptation of Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* (2006). But don't be fooled by its apparent slightness. *9 Songs*' spirited little challenge to contemporary censorship and the limits of what is acceptable to put in a mainstream film about love may ultimately have a more lasting effect than any of Winterbottom's more prestigious projects on what we can and cannot see in our movie theaters.

NOTES

1. David Smith, "Director Defends Rating for Explicit Film," *Observer* (24 October 2004).
2. Hugh Muir, "Key Three Unfazed by Real Sex in *9 Songs*," *Guardian* (25 October 2004).
3. Smith, "Director Defends."
4. Nick Bradshaw, "Film Q&A: Michael Winterbottom," *Time Out* (9 March 2005), 70.
5. Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).
6. Bradshaw, "Film Q&A."
7. Ibid.
8. George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), 91.
9. Anthony Lane, *Nobody's Perfect: Writings for The New Yorker* (London: Picador, 2002), 234.
10. Quoted in Skye Sherwin, "The Odd Couple," *Guardian* (19 November 2004).

MELANIE WILLIAMS teaches in the Department of Film Studies at the University of Hull, U.K.

ABSTRACT There's not much narrative complexity to Michael Winterbottom's *9 Songs*. A couple meets, has lots of sex, goes to lots of concerts, and then splits up. However, the film's simple structure belies its provocative challenge to the boundaries of porn and mainstream cinema with sex scenes that are real, not faked.

BOOK REVIEWS

Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas

By Poshek Fu. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. $49.50. 228 pages.

The first major English-language book on Chinese cinema, *Dianying/Electric Shadows,* was published by the late Jay Leyda in 1972. Since then, politics and Chinese cinema have remained inextricable, if not coterminous. Why politics? For scholars who are interested in non-Western cinema, politics is always a key word tied to unfamiliar cinematic territories. Maybe this motivated Leyda to write a personal account of an emerging socialist state and its newborn cinema. Like the Soviet cinema, Chinese cinema became an attractive scholarly object because of its revolutionary provenance. This interest persisted, prompting George Semsel to call his edited volume *Chinese Film: the State of the Art in the People's Republic* (1987). Paul Clark followed suit with his astute investigation, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (1987).

The preference for the cinema of the PRC changed when Chinese film scholars began to look into events before the bloody civil war of 1949 (which established the PRC) in order to build a more comprehensive Chinese film historiography. Poshek Fu's book is by far the best scholarly endeavor to tackle this task, providing a wide and inclusive treatment of Chinese film history. As Fu rightly points out, pre-revolutionary cinema was until recently off limits to historians outside China. As for the films made under Japanese occupation, the so-called captive cinema (1941-1945), they remained largely a forbidden archive limited to a handful of select Chinese scholars. Only when Chinese film archives began to relax their visiting policies and, more recently, release their collections on video, were formerly classified materials made available for research. Fu's book, in this regard, is both witness to, and exciting outcome of, a welcome—though belated—gift from Chinese authorities.

Between Shanghai and Hong Kong is a succinctly structured and organized book, with only three chapters, a preface, and an epilogue. The structure might appear simple, but the scope and range of material covered far surpass most volumes of a similar nature. By linking together two major Chinese metropolises—Shanghai and Hong Kong—Fu draws an axis pointing to some of the most important topics in Chinese film history: the establishment of film business practice at the pinnacle of imperialist expansion, and the rise of transnational Chinese trade networks in the 1930s. More important is Fu's close examination of how cinema was also subject to the interplay of identity conflicts and patriotism—the regional and language contests between Mandarin film production based in Shanghai and Hong Kong/Guangzhou-made Cantonese-language pictures; and the national struggles between Chinese and British, and Chinese and Japanese administrations. Shanghai and Hong Kong were both birthplaces of China's cinema at the turn of the century, but both were considered imperialist entrepots and emblems of corrupted Chineseness. According to Fu, Shanghai and Hong Kong are reputed to be cities of commercial strength, but each suffers a relative political and cultural weakness. Fu argues that Northern cultural chauvinism (which he calls the "Central Plains syndrome") views Shanghai with contempt. Ironically, when Shanghai emigrés happily took to Hong Kong as an economic and political shelter, they imposed the Central Plains chauvinism onto their hosts, treating the city as a cultural desert. Chinese intellectuals, including those from Shanghai, saw the British colony as suitable for economic pursuit and little else. It is only logical for Fu to link the two cities together when he is concerned with two major issues in modern Chinese film history—money and politics.

Shanghai not only gave birth to colonial modernity in China, as Fu describes in his first chapter, "Mapping Shanghai Cinema Under Semi-Occupation," it was also the capital of the film business until the Communist Revolution in the late 1940s. Like all other modern technologies brought to Shanghai by missionaries, traders, and imperialists, cinema remained a cultural form and institution operating within two constraints —government regulation and capitalist logic. In chapter 3, "The Struggle to Entertain," Fu examines these two constraints in the context of a national defense against the Japanese occupation, showing how the cinema managed to survive its negotiation between patriotic ideologies and business interests.

Fu meticulously describes the film culture of Shanghai from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s. Other scholars have attempted to sketch this period of Chinese film history, but they either fail to document correct titles, names, and events, or they are just not conversant enough with international film history to fully chart the institutional course of the first Chinese film capital. In the past few years, scholars have begun to recuperate Shanghai films by focusing on leftist treasures, vernacular film culture, and noted directors and stars. But to understand Shanghai cinema we need to have more research on the institutions of the cinema. Exhibition, distribution, and reception have remained the most underdocumented areas in Shanghai film historiography. Fortunately, Fu's book offers a lucid illustration of these areas. Furthermore, his focus on tycoons, studio executives, and cultural officials personalizes what might otherwise be dry facts and figures. Institutional history under Fu's treatment becomes a series of enthralling stories and vignettes. I consider this to be the book's major strength and a significant contribution to the field of film historiography.

Hong Kong, on the other hand, was a vital, albeit overlooked, film capital throughout the first part of the twentieth century. After the establishment of the PRC, British-controlled Hong Kong became the region's film trade center when investment capital was shifted from Shanghai after 1949. This was a well-known episode of postwar capitalist development, but it had yet to be systematically analyzed. Fu's epilogue, "Filming Shanghai in Hong Kong," provides an in-depth, extended account of this sea change. Here Fu introduces us to specific cases concerning postwar politics of identity, regional expansion, and business interests.

The only section of the book that may slightly jar the reader is the second chapter, "Between Nationalism and Colonialism: Rewriting Hong Kong Cinema," where the author strongly protests a Hong Kong identity damaged by the Central Plains syndrome. It's true that the Northern rulers in Beijing are happy to maintain the longstanding condescension toward Hong Kong and Shanghai. But an alternative view could be useful. We could imagine a line of competing culture capitals jockeying for regional, if not national, preeminence. Unlike Beijing or even Taipei, which sit comfortably—if not always securely—with their own political will-to-power, Shanghai and Hong Kong are constantly justifying their cultural and political legitimacy. Like sibling rivals, Shanghai and Hong Kong bicker and nag, attacking each other's weaknesses and exaggerating their own strengths. It is within this complex web of cultural and political insecurity that Fu's tale of two film capitals is ably recounted.

EMILIE YY YEH is Associate Professor of Film and Television Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University.

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Career Movies: American Business and the Success Mystique

By Jack Boozer. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002. $55.00 cloth; $22.95 paper. 292 pages.

Class analysis of film typically deals with the neglect or distortion of representations of the industrial working class. Jack Boozer's *Career Movies: American Business and the Success Mystique* reminds us that class analysis applies to executives and entrepreneurs too. Concentrating on films from the second half of the twentieth century, Boozer argues that depictions of business careers form a major theme in American cinema. Looking at a diverse selection of films, the author convincingly details a deep cultural ambivalence in U.S. culture between the endorsement of laissez-faire capitalism (especially in its entrepreneurial stage and concomitant promotion of an individualist ethos) on the one hand, and the competing need for regulation and control to promote the social good. Recent events such as the Enron scandal are a perfect example. The energy-trading innovators became celebrities in the business press and beyond—essentially beyond criticism and untouchable—up to the point of total meltdown, when the rats started deserting the sinking ship. Damning tapes caught manipulators laughing at how artificially inflated energy prices could cause suffering for elderly widows.

Boozer develops his analysis with suggestive examples rather than an exhaustive inventory. A good choice, this makes the book readable, provocative at times, and richly suggestive as it details the dramas, comedies, and satires of business success. Predictably, the first chapter studies the classical corporate executive film with central attention to *Executive Suite* and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit,* and the little-known adaptation of a Rod Serling TV drama, *Patterns,* to the big screen. Thus Boozer satisfies the predictable expectation and also provides an interesting change of pace. One feature that makes the study so refreshing is the way it highlights unexpected examples in order to complicate analysis. Thus the chapter on career women provides *Mildred Pierce* and *Working Girl* as key examples, and concludes with *The Grifters.* Likewise, the chapter on entrepreneurs presents *Save the Tiger* and *Tucker: The Man and his Dreams,* while making an unexpected detour to *Mississippi Masala* and *Do the Right Thing* (Sal's Pizza), and then turning to femmes fatales in *Disclosure* and *The Last Seduction,* with a side glance at *Chinatown.* Boozer's chapter on the public-relations figure begins with *The Hucksters* and *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* before proceeding to a tour-de-force original analysis of *North By Northwest* (Thornhill as ad exec). Included in this chapter: *The Electric Horseman, The Player,* and *Jerry McGuire.* An additional chapter on "televisuality" is more conventional as it looks at *Wag the Dog, The Truman Show, Pleasantville,* and *The Insider.*

Boozer's study of the ideology of success in U.S. business film points to a persistent myth for individuals which is increasingly transformed and thwarted by the shift to a globalized market propelled by high-tech, service, and financial sectors. In the discussions of *Wall Street* and *American Beauty* that bookend the volume, Boozer shows how the previous norm of a perceived public good that results from balancing the goals of corporations and families has declined with the neoconservative triumph of market solutions for everything; in an "ownership society," the social bond evaporates. The small-business and grass-roots values of a Capra-esque America are contradicted by the high failure rate of petty entrepreneurs amid the corporate encroachment of big-box chain stores. Of course there is a massive contradiction between the "family values" asserted by social conservatives and fundamentalists and the actual behavior of corporations engaged in union busting, forced overtime, and reduced or denied benefits and pensions.

While it seems unlikely that the business success film will suddenly be regarded as a basic film genre, Boozer's argument produces an excellent overview of cultural and historic change as reflected/distorted in postwar films. Inevitably, in a study of this type, the reader can productively question what seem like significant omissions, such as the gangster as businessman, or more recent biopics that depict entertainment and sports figures as working within capitalist contexts. The study could have benefited from a wider view that pointed to persistent American tropes such as the confidence man, or major artists who address the American success myth, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Preston Sturges. Because the study confines itself to cinema, it neglects any mention of television, which provides many pertinent texts ranging from bedroom and boardroom melodramas ("Dallas," "Dynasty," etc.) to gangsters ("The Sopranos," "The Wire") and, of course, "The Apprentice." Probably every reader will come up with his or her own unexplained omissions (e.g., *Falling Down, The Coneheads, The Hudsucker Proxy*; and my own personal peeve—no discussion of *Fight Club*). In an even wider frame, it seems that much of the critique of the American success myth also transpires in nonbusiness corporate structures:

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obviously the government—including the military, law enforcement, and the law—but also in key cases the church (*The Cardinal, Leap of Faith*), medicine, education, and the arts. Since most Americans don't pursue business careers and our best MBA programs have a majority of students from abroad, perhaps business success is now a vanishing goal.

In terms of a larger, international film analysis, examining the ideology of success through Hollywood film presents one obvious problem. The dominant cinema's narrative forms have never moved behind a drama of individuals to provide a collective or structural analysis of the system as a whole. As Brecht pointed out so well, the realist-naturalist tradition remains mired in an emotional individualism that inhibits more reflective thought about deeper problems and more profound solutions than simple changes of heart or luck. But that calls for a cinema that defines success beyond individual careers and affluence. Films that imagine success as a matter of raising a whole community's standard of living, improving the environment, providing universal healthcare, or achieving social justice, occupy a different space.

CHUCK KLEINHANS, co-editor of *Jump Cut,* teaches in Northwestern University's Radio/Television/Film Department.

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Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines

By Nick Deocampo. Quezon City, Philippines: The National Commission for the Culture and the Arts, 2003. $35.00. 450 pages.

In his book *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines,* Nick Deocampo explores the history of cinema in the Philippines through an examination of Spanish influences—not only in cinema, but in culture and language as well. It is important to note, however, that his book is not a collective history of "Filipino cinema" itself, as much as it is a history of film's development in a colonial system, a system that is also reflected through this cinematic progress. This reflection, according to Deocampo, contains remnants of Spanish influence which, he argues, have been overlooked and even neglected by previous film historians. It is here that Deocampo establishes the role of *Cine* as an examination of both the history of cinema in the Philippines and the formation of postcolonial Filipino national identity. According to Deocampo, cinema "may have been the last major cultural legacy the Philippines derived from its relations with its former colonizer, Spain" (3). To make his claim, Deocampo establishes a clear outline of historical events through which he is able to demonstrate the dominance of Spanish culture in the Philippines during the development of cinema.

In his introduction, Deocampo takes issue with the term "Filipino," arguing that accepting such a term omits the Spanish influences on early Filipino identity, and "deprives us of understanding the actual cultural evolution and politics surrounding the growth of cinema in the country" (8). In doing so, he also brings into question scholars such as Clodualdo A. del Mundo, whose book, *Native Resistance: Philippine Cinema and Colonialism,* places emphasis on the film industry that grew out of the American colonial period and classical Hollywood cinema. What Deocampo attempts to interrogate is del Mundo's use of the term "native," which for Deocampo is a problematic term much like the term Filipino, since it can be read in several different ways. As Deocampo writes: "This is why, reading del Mundo's book, one finds it quite hard to appreciate his assumption of a native resistance when he has not fully explained the nature of the historical process informing his readers' understanding of the 'native'" (9). By elaborating on notions of the "native," Deocampo clarifies this ambiguity in order to more accurately engage the history of cinema in the Philippines, a task that, according to him, del Mundo and other historians have yet to undertake. This historical clarification is the grounds on which Deocampo continues to develop his argument regarding the influences of Spanish culture in the Philippines. Here he again stresses the importance of these influences and the role that they played not only during the rise of a nation but also during the development of an autonomous identity and culture. In this portion of the book, Deocampo argues that one cannot address notions of Filipino cinema without first examining the colonial past of the Philippines, and the cultural evolution that gave way to the term Filipino. In this sense, Deocampo's book attempts to define that term by examining the cultural ties that the Philippines had with Spain, ultimately becoming the primer with which Filipino cinema can further be examined.

In order to address notions of national identity, Deocampo examines the development of Filipino culture as it is reflected in cinematic progress. In the first chapter of the book, entitled "Cinema and Language," Deocampo examines *anuncios* (advertisements placed in local publications that described cinematic events) in order to ground his assertions that the Spanish influence was strong during the introduction of film. These *anuncios,* some of which are reproduced as stills in Deocampo's book, not only document the arrival and birth of cinema in the Philippines, establishing a first public viewing date of January 3, 1897, but also capture the evolution of Filipino identity. In retrospect, these *anuncios* provide Deocampo with the evidence needed to validate his claims of Spanish influence, as the *anuncios* themselves slowly evolved from Spanish-language advertisements for both the apparatus and the films to Tagalog-language ads that place emphasis on directors and actors, ultimately giving birth to the Philippines' own star system.

Contrary to previous historians and theories, Deocampo argues that the cinema's initial growth in the Philippines was anything but consistent and rapid, rather that it was inhibited by the outbreak of the Philippine revolution against Spain, as well as by the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the Filipino-American War in 1899. In his second chapter, "Cinema and Revolution," Deocampo explores Filipino cinema's temporary dormancy due to these revolutionary wars. Again citing *anuncios* as his primary sources, Deocampo notes that the first private screening was held on January 1, 1897, with a public viewing held two days later. Deocampo pays particular

obviously the government—including the military, law enforcement, and the law—but also in key cases the church (*The Cardinal, Leap of Faith*), medicine, education, and the arts. Since most Americans don't pursue business careers and our best MBA programs have a majority of students from abroad, perhaps business success is now a vanishing goal.

In terms of a larger, international film analysis, examining the ideology of success through Hollywood film presents one obvious problem. The dominant cinema's narrative forms have never moved behind a drama of individuals to provide a collective or structural analysis of the system as a whole. As Brecht pointed out so well, the realist-naturalist tradition remains mired in an emotional individualism that inhibits more reflective thought about deeper problems and more profound solutions than simple changes of heart or luck. But that calls for a cinema that defines success beyond individual careers and affluence. Films that imagine success as a matter of raising a whole community's standard of living, improving the environment, providing universal healthcare, or achieving social justice, occupy a different space.

CHUCK KLEINHANS, co-editor of *Jump Cut,* teaches in Northwestern University's Radio/Television/Film Department.

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Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines

By Nick Deocampo. Quezon City, Philippines: The National Commission for the Culture and the Arts, 2003. $35.00. 450 pages.

In his book *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines,* Nick Deocampo explores the history of cinema in the Philippines through an examination of Spanish influences—not only in cinema, but in culture and language as well. It is important to note, however, that his book is not a collective history of "Filipino cinema" itself, as much as it is a history of film's development in a colonial system, a system that is also reflected through this cinematic progress. This reflection, according to Deocampo, contains remnants of Spanish influence which, he argues, have been overlooked and even neglected by previous film historians. It is here that Deocampo establishes the role of *Cine* as an examination of both the history of cinema in the Philippines and the formation of postcolonial Filipino national identity. According to Deocampo, cinema "may have been the last major cultural legacy the Philippines derived from its relations with its former colonizer, Spain" (3). To make his claim, Deocampo establishes a clear outline of historical events through which he is able to demonstrate the dominance of Spanish culture in the Philippines during the development of cinema.

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attention to these dates, as the first screenings of films in the Philippines came a mere two days after the execution of Dr. José Rizal, who was an alleged accomplice of the Katipunan, a rebel force. By examining this sequence of events, Deocampo provides evidence for his claims that cinema was in fact present before the previously assumed date of the early 1900s, when the United States began to colonize the Philippines. Again, Deocampo argues against del Mundo, whose book focuses on the American colonial system and *its* influences on the cinema of the Philippines. By providing this historical outline, Deocampo continues to draw attention to the much-neglected Spanish influence and the impact that it had on both the culture of the Philippines, and the development of early cinema.

The latter portion of Deocampo's book, "Spanish Influences on Tagalog Cinema," further investigates the term Filipino, and attempts to make distinctions between Filipino-born Spaniards and those who were indigenous to the islands. Deocampo concludes that the term Filipino, which originally referred to Spaniards who had been born on Philippine soil, was latter appropriated by natives during their revolutionary efforts. Here Deocampo draws a direct correlation between the appropriation of the term and the cinematic apparatus that was originally introduced by Spanish privateers. Just as the natives of the Philippines appropriated Spanish dialect and Hispanic culture, so too did they adopt the Spanish cinema as a medium of their own. Most interesting is how Deocampo notes that scholars such as del Mundo previously studied these influences in Filipino cinema, citing the roots of these influences from the strong Spanish theatrical tradition that was carried over to the Philippines. According to Deocampo, early cinema in the Philippines mimetically resembled the *moro-moro* and the *zarzuela* (forms of Spanish theater): "In all these, it was evident that during film's formative stage, cinema had theater as its most reliable source not only of inspiration but also of modes of production" (206).

Here Deocampo again takes issue with del Mundo's interpretations of the same information. While Deocampo acknowledges the relationship between Spanish theater and early cinema in the Philippines, he goes on to challenge del Mundo's interpretations of these films as a form of "native resistance." While Deocampo's book successfully outlines the historical occurrences that may have influenced the development of cinema in the Philippines, it is important to note that it is not a critique of these events, or a discursive examination of the implications of such findings. When held in contrast to del Mundo's book, the key issue at hand becomes not the impact the Spanish presence had on early Filipino identity, but again the reception of this influence. According to Deocampo, del Mundo attributes too much significance to the American colonial system. Deocampo instead argues for the importance of pre-American colonial forces in the development of cinema in the Philippines.

Offering an alternative to previously established notions of Philippine cinema, particularly in regard to the historical introduction of the filmic apparatus, Deocampo's book is definitely an effective tool for investigating the history of an overlooked phenomenon. It opens up further academic possibilities through its historical findings.

TOM GALARAGA is a graduate student in Critical Studies at the University of Southern California School of Cinema-Television.

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Cinema & Culture: Independent Film in the United States, 1980-2001

By E. Deirdre Pribram. New York: Peter Lang, 2002. $32.95. 305 pages.

All writing on contemporary film runs into a basic problem: accurate today; outdated tomorrow. Satisfying the desire for the news about the new is never easy. For all the film buffs and scholars devoted to the full expanse of film history, there are at least as many individuals whose interest is limited to the narrow band of recent history that can be described as "the contemporary." In *The Dreamers,* Bernardo Bertolucci demonstrates, intentionally or not, that 1968 and the New Wave are a long time ago, in that distant period before videos, before DVDs, before CGI, before . . . lots of things. Katherine Hepburn has died, making the Golden Age of Hollywood appear even more distant. Film studies has morphed into cinema studies and now cinema and media studies, even if this publication is still *Film Quarterly*.

E. Deidre Pribram's *Cinema & Culture: Independent Film in the United States, 1980-2001* is a serious attempt to put the contemporary scene into perspective. Maybe too serious. As is suggested by its unhelpful title—so general as to be more suitable for a book series than an individual volume—the book applies recent theory to recent cinema. The results, at first, are a slog. Ms. Pribram, a writer/director of the narrative feature *The Family Business* and the editor of the anthology *Female Spectators,* has read a lot, viewed a lot, and thought a lot, but she proceeds at first with the dull deliberateness and stupefying style of a bad dissertation. If this is the only alternative to "impressionistic" or "journalistic" writing about film, I want no part of it, either. For a while now, the grand theoretical style of, say, Metz, has given way in some quarters to another approach that emphasizes industrial factors and is full of talk of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception. At bottom, though, this is too often merely repackaged *Variety*-style trade talk or vulgar Marxism. Such studies, as in this case, frequently reflect almost no knowledge of non-film economics. While well-intentioned, the effort is misguided and less than satisfactory.

Identifying independent films (both American and non-American) distributed in the United States from 1980 to the present as "a discrete culture site," as well as a "shifting, malleable discursive field," Pribram is forced into a series of contortions to justify her approach. On *The English Patient,* she comes up with this: "So while the film's qualifications as independent were not immediately recognizable and are doubtful at best, they were perceived, in some quarters, as arguable." Hmm. The periodization also appears problematic:

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chronological neatness is not historical justification. Then there is the matter of foreign films (i.e., international art films) versus home-grown independents, a distinction she handles poorly. She excludes from the category of "international cinema" English-language films from countries such as Australia, placing them in her other art film categories. Sorry, mates; your talk is not foreign enough. The international cinema was bound up with art cinema in the heyday of Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni, Kurosawa, and the international cinema is still bound up with independent film, however each is defined. But to place *The Last Metro* and *Ran* among a group of foreign films that were "formative in the foundation of independent film" in the 1980s and 1990s is to raise, once again, far more questions than are answered, beginning with "Where did she get that idea?" and "Is she talking about the business of independent film exhibition?"

Acknowledging a problem is not the same as solving it. Having spelled out any number of possible criteria from budget size to aesthetics, Pribram falls back on the weak notion that to qualify as independent, a film must consists of "some combination, even if a minimal one, of the attributes." The philosopher of science Stephen Toulmin once remarked that definitions are like belts: the tighter they are the more they hold up. I am afraid Pribram's approach results in dropped trousers. It often fails to provide either a useful general framework or a sensible way of considering specific films, as when she mentions *Blood Simple,* but then rules out "low-budget genre pictures made in the Hollywood mold."

I sympathize, because I do not believe there is any simple, happy way to sort things out. The independent movement, in the wake of Soderbergh's success with *sex, lies and videotape* in 1989, was as much a product of pop-cultural buzz and PR hype as of any substantial structural change, as evidenced by the rhetoric of independence surrounding the Oscars in 1997, when *Jerry Maguire* was the only studio film nominated for Best Picture. *The Blair Witch Project* and other one-hit wonders reveal that there is always a chance for a long shot to pay off, but that does not mean the industry has changed to a more open model. In fact, part of the unintended pathos of this book is that the bloom is off the movement, if it ever existed. Many of the small distribution companies listed in an appendix have been swallowed up by the majors or gone kaput, and for all the small films from the U.S. or abroad around the edges of the industry, the big gorillas are still getting most of the box office. (It is fitting that Peter Jackson should turn from *The Lord of the Rings* to *King Kong*.) Pribram rules out documentaries after acknowledging their importance in the independent universe. That may be just as well, since Michael Moore has exploded her notion of indies not being exhibited at mall multiplexes. The situation could change at any moment—it may be equally fortunate that Pribram did not have to address *The Passion of the Christ*—but in any event, to judge the indie movement by either Oscar or box-office criteria is questionable (and maybe "arguable").

Despite Pribram's difficulty in providing a foundation upon which to build her arguments, she does manage to present some interesting ideas. What she really wants to talk about, it eventually becomes clear, is the presentation of women in contemporary cinema. So when she, a self-described "feminist and proponent of identity politics," is discussing *Orlando, The Accused,* and *The Piano,* she writes with vitality and conviction, even if I do find her analysis of African-American films by women—*Daughters of the Dust* and *Girl on the IRT*—crude and too reliant on other critics. Then, however, other perils appear, and are not entirely avoided. Why grant significant space to *Naked*? Why *Pulp Fiction*? To make the book less feminist-centric and perhaps more marketable to guy readers? To move, with Tarantino (and cultural studies) into the realm of the postmodern, with Baudrillard quotations hoisted aloft accompanied by a critique of codes of masculinity?

After saying that Scorsese represents outmoded modernism and Tarantino represents postmodernist appropriation of others' identities, Pribram goes on to express the hope that independent film will participate in "the construction of representational, institutional, interpretive, and cultural/historical discourses that enable multiple identies to simultaneously and inclusively coexist, that is, an independent cinema that puts into practice a more fully heterogeneous conceptualization of cultural production." Bravo for the thought, if not for all the verbiage. Pribram concludes with a brief mention of the most recent hope for independent pluralism, the Internet. Maybe. I remember video as the supposed instrument of utopian media democracy. I remember cable as the focus of let-a-thousand-points-of-view-bloom hopes. But every time I turn on my television, I see Fox and the other networks owned by massive conglomerates, along with endless niche channels. To date, the Internet remains an infinite number of infinitesimal, marginal sites of independent media activity.

Making choices about which works to discuss at length is the bane of all textbook authors, and it is also a problem here. Whether to go with the familiar blockbusters or select a lesser-known personal favorite in the hopes that it will open some eyes, that is the question. Any choice can seem arbitrary, merely personal. I admire Pribram's discussion of *Naked,* but it is disconnected from the larger issues of the industry. And then, like too many books of its kind, this one concludes with 12 pages of "illustrations," only one significant (a poster for *To Sleep with Anger* that supports her discussion of marketing), followed by almost 40 pages of lists of films, year by year, distributor by distributor. This struck me as neither scholarship nor important data, but padding.

A lucid, informative book threatens to emerge from behind the pastiche of facts, figures, and anecdotal information Pribram too often relies on—but that doesn't happen. In the end, I wondered who this book was for. Cineastes? They would not need to be told about "the French New Wave, a group of filmmakers and critics who came to the fore in the 1960s." Students? Only if the course were taught by Ms. Pribram and her favored films were assigned. The general public and casual fans? I suspect they'll go for gossip-and-gush—with some useful information and serious ideas—from Peter Biskind, or stick with the magazines and celebrity bios. Granted, most of the other books on contemporary American cinema are pretty weak, as are the final chapters in

the big survey histories. The anthologies edited by Jon Lewis (*The New American Cinema*; *The End of Cinema As We Know It*) and by Steve Neale and Murray Smith (*Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*), if inevitably hit-or-miss, are at their best much better, because they are more focused and aimed at faculty and advanced students. In any event, for a book so concerned with audience, Pribram's betrays a surprising failure to define its own target readership.

ROBERT SILBERMAN is a member of the Department of Art History at the University of Minnesota; he has published on Jan Troell, Mike de Leon, Terrence Malick, and other filmmakers.

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The Cinema of Italy

Edited by Giorgio Bertellini. New York: Wallflower Press, 2004. $65.00 cloth; $24.50 paper. 271 pages.

It is important to point out at once that *The Cinema of Italy* is part of a series, "24 Frames," because this fact has obviously determined the nature of the book. The inside cover page informs us that "Rather than offering a 'best of' selection, the feature films and documentaries selected in each volume serve to highlight the specific elements of that territory's cinema." This is a necessary preamble to an anthology with such an ambitious scope: a diachronic study of the cinema of an entire country. Indeed, this defensive stance is reiterated by volume editor Giorgio Bertellini, clearly cognizant of the skepticism that such a project may evoke, at the start of the introduction. He states that "A study of twenty-four films aimed at discussing the entirety of Italian cinema may appear as either a dim-witted gamble or a plainly imprudent aspiration" (1). He also finds it necessary to identify the target audience, "the interested readers and movie-goers who are not, necessarily, already conversant in Italian film history or culture," as opposed to film scholars (3). Bertellini then mentions other studies on the Italian cinema in order to demonstrate how his collection of essays is different. For example, he names Peter Bondanella's *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present,* Marcia Landy's *Italian Cinema,* and Angela Dalle Vacche's *The Body in the Mirror: Shapes and History in Italian Cinema,* and declares that none of these works "set out to be an introductory manual for the interested reader," as his volume does.

Although the introduction is relatively brief, it is of crucial importance, perhaps as much to Bertellini as to the readers, for he goes to a lot of trouble to anticipate possible objections to his project and to justify his decisions. For example, he informs us that "This collection intentionally and unapologetically sidesteps the four most internationally acclaimed Italian films of the late 1980s and early 1990s, all winners of Academy Awards . . . *Cinema Paradiso* . . . *Mediterraneo* . . . *Il postino* . . . and *La vita e bella*" (8). The reason for the exclusion of these high-profile films, Bertellini explains, is that a full understanding of "their aesthetic and historical importance" depends on the analysis of the equally remarkable, but less-studied titles included in this collection. Furthermore, he informs the reader that the essays are in "plain language" and "not expressly intended for the professional scholar" (9). In the end, I believe that so much defensive rhetoric is unnecessary. This volume is an excellent resource for the target audience he has named, for students, and for film buffs in general.

The 24 brief essays in the volume, each one consisting of about seven pages, are organized chronologically and form thematic clusters as well. We see, for example, that Bertellini situates *Rocco and His Brothers, Paisà, Bicycle Thief, Bitter Rice, Senso*, and *La Strada* as a grouping that represents Neorealism, but he then thematically subdivides them, with *Bitter Rice* and *Senso* representing an attempted "synthesis of neorealist civic themes . . . with spectacular cinema inspired by prurient and melodramatic photo-romance" (4). *Rocco and His Brothers* and *La Strada,* on the other hand, "combined political engagement with stories of marginalized subjects" (4). Although Bertellini's remark is not clear, based on the readings offered we must assume that *Rocco and His Brothers* illustrates the former and *La Strada* the latter.

In many cases, the mini-essays are little gems that encapsulate the essence of the film under discussion. One of these is John David Rhodes' discussion of *Divorce Italian Style.* Following the pattern that prevails in the essays, Rhodes first offers some background, explaining the historical moment that informs the film. His basic thesis is that this film, directed by Pietro Germi in 1961, "suggests implicitly that the Sicilian condition . . . is perhaps only an exaggerated version of the state of things throughout the entire country" (113). Rhodes then places the film in a cinematic context, briefly elucidating how it relates to the Neorealism that preceded it and the *commedia all'italiana* that it pioneered. Consonant with the implicit needs of the target audience, Rhodes offers a summary of the film plot before going on to illustrate its artistic merits. In short, this is a neat little package for the reader who may have more curiosity than information about Italian cinema.

Jacqueline Reich's discussion of Federico Fellini's *8½* is equally effective. Her discussion of the director's fascination with and deployment of Jungian psychology is quite straightforward yet presumes some previous knowledge on the part of the reader. This allows her to negotiate the narrow gap between the abstruse and the condescending in a particularly tactful manner. Her essay remains free of jargon even when it would be useful. We see, for instance, that in discussing the film's meta-cinematic theme, she does not ever mention the word, preferring instead to say that it is "a film about Fellini making a film" (144).

While there are few new interpretations, the essays are solid examples of scholarship by an impressive list of contributors. Among them we find Millicent Marcus on Wertmuller's *Love and Anarchy,* Peter Bondanella on Fellini's *La Strada,* Antonio Vitti on De Santis's *Bitter Rice,* Patrick Rumble on Pasolini's *Accattone,* and Gaetana Marrone on Cavani's *The Night Porter.* Of particular interest is Maurizio Viano's interpretation of Ferreri's *La grande bouffe,* a 1973 film that has received scant attention over the years. Viano disputes the accepted readings to argue that "*La grande bouffe* is not the

the big survey histories. The anthologies edited by Jon Lewis (*The New American Cinema*; *The End of Cinema As We Know It*) and by Steve Neale and Murray Smith (*Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*), if inevitably hit-or-miss, are at their best much better, because they are more focused and aimed at faculty and advanced students. In any event, for a book so concerned with audience, Pribram's betrays a surprising failure to define its own target readership.

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Edited by Giorgio Bertellini. New York: Wallflower Press, 2004. $65.00 cloth; $24.50 paper. 271 pages.

It is important to point out at once that *The Cinema of Italy* is part of a series, "24 Frames," because this fact has obviously determined the nature of the book. The inside cover page informs us that "Rather than offering a 'best of' selection, the feature films and documentaries selected in each volume serve to highlight the specific elements of that territory's cinema." This is a necessary preamble to an anthology with such an ambitious scope: a diachronic study of the cinema of an entire country. Indeed, this defensive stance is reiterated by volume editor Giorgio Bertellini, clearly cognizant of the skepticism that such a project may evoke, at the start of the introduction. He states that "A study of twenty-four films aimed at discussing the entirety of Italian cinema may appear as either a dim-witted gamble or a plainly imprudent aspiration" (1). He also finds it necessary to identify the target audience, "the interested readers and movie-goers who are not, necessarily, already conversant in Italian film history or culture," as opposed to film scholars (3). Bertellini then mentions other studies on the Italian cinema in order to demonstrate how his collection of essays is different. For example, he names Peter Bondanella's *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present,* Marcia Landy's *Italian Cinema,* and Angela Dalle Vacche's *The Body in the Mirror: Shapes and History in Italian Cinema,* and declares that none of these works "set out to be an introductory manual for the interested reader," as his volume does.

Although the introduction is relatively brief, it is of crucial importance, perhaps as much to Bertellini as to the readers, for he goes to a lot of trouble to anticipate possible objections to his project and to justify his decisions. For example, he informs us that "This collection intentionally and unapologetically sidesteps the four most internationally acclaimed Italian films of the late 1980s and early 1990s, all winners of Academy Awards . . . *Cinema Paradiso* . . . *Mediterraneo* . . . *Il postino* . . . and *La vita e bella*" (8). The reason for the exclusion of these high-profile films, Bertellini explains, is that a full understanding of "their aesthetic and historical importance" depends on the analysis of the equally remarkable, but less-studied titles included in this collection. Furthermore, he informs the reader that the essays are in "plain language" and "not expressly intended for the professional scholar" (9). In the end, I believe that so much defensive rhetoric is unnecessary. This volume is an excellent resource for the target audience he has named, for students, and for film buffs in general.

The 24 brief essays in the volume, each one consisting of about seven pages, are organized chronologically and form thematic clusters as well. We see, for example, that Bertellini situates *Rocco and His Brothers, Paisà, Bicycle Thief, Bitter Rice, Senso*, and *La Strada* as a grouping that represents Neorealism, but he then thematically subdivides them, with *Bitter Rice* and *Senso* representing an attempted "synthesis of neorealist civic themes . . . with spectacular cinema inspired by prurient and melodramatic photo-romance" (4). *Rocco and His Brothers* and *La Strada,* on the other hand, "combined political engagement with stories of marginalized subjects" (4). Although Bertellini's remark is not clear, based on the readings offered we must assume that *Rocco and His Brothers* illustrates the former and *La Strada* the latter.

In many cases, the mini-essays are little gems that encapsulate the essence of the film under discussion. One of these is John David Rhodes' discussion of *Divorce Italian Style.* Following the pattern that prevails in the essays, Rhodes first offers some background, explaining the historical moment that informs the film. His basic thesis is that this film, directed by Pietro Germi in 1961, "suggests implicitly that the Sicilian condition . . . is perhaps only an exaggerated version of the state of things throughout the entire country" (113). Rhodes then places the film in a cinematic context, briefly elucidating how it relates to the Neorealism that preceded it and the *commedia all'italiana* that it pioneered. Consonant with the implicit needs of the target audience, Rhodes offers a summary of the film plot before going on to illustrate its artistic merits. In short, this is a neat little package for the reader who may have more curiosity than information about Italian cinema.

Jacqueline Reich's discussion of Federico Fellini's *8½* is equally effective. Her discussion of the director's fascination with and deployment of Jungian psychology is quite straightforward yet presumes some previous knowledge on the part of the reader. This allows her to negotiate the narrow gap between the abstruse and the condescending in a particularly tactful manner. Her essay remains free of jargon even when it would be useful. We see, for instance, that in discussing the film's meta-cinematic theme, she does not ever mention the word, preferring instead to say that it is "a film about Fellini making a film" (144).

While there are few new interpretations, the essays are solid examples of scholarship by an impressive list of contributors. Among them we find Millicent Marcus on Wertmuller's *Love and Anarchy,* Peter Bondanella on Fellini's *La Strada,* Antonio Vitti on De Santis's *Bitter Rice,* Patrick Rumble on Pasolini's *Accattone,* and Gaetana Marrone on Cavani's *The Night Porter.* Of particular interest is Maurizio Viano's interpretation of Ferreri's *La grande bouffe,* a 1973 film that has received scant attention over the years. Viano disputes the accepted readings to argue that "*La grande bouffe* is not the

story of four successfully planned suicides. It is an allegorical tale that dramatizes the body's subjection to a humiliating, ironic and engaging fate: food is a primary necessity yet . . . turns into a deathly threat" (198).

The preface by Gian Piero Brunetta, an authority on Italian film criticism in Italy, consists of only five paragraphs and is curiously ambivalent about this volume. He devotes one entire paragraph not to the present collection, but to extolling the merits of Peter Bondanella's pioneering *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present* (1983; revised 2001). While admittedly pronouncing Bertellini's anthology to be a "solid collection," there is an unmistakable air of condescension in this lukewarm preface. Perhaps it would have been better to omit it altogether. The only thing it adds to *The Cinema of Italy* is the luster of Brunetta's name.

One other point worth noting is that along with the occasional lapses in grammar (double prepositions and prepositions at the end of sentences in particular), there is a significant error that should have been caught in the editing process. In the essay on *La Ciociara*, the author claims that the Ciociaria is a rural area in the province of Naples. That it is actually in the Lazio is not an abstruse fact that would have been difficult to verify. This is worth underlining because, as we know, the Ciociaria is more than just the setting of the Oscar-winning film; as the film's title suggests, it is central to the film and, incidentally, to this author's entire essay—both as geographic locale and theme.

In spite of these minor weaknesses, I believe there is little doubt that *The Cinema of Italy* successfully fulfills its stated aims. It is clearly a product intended to fill the gap between scholarly studies aimed at professionals in the field of cinema studies, and books for students and other lovers of the medium. And it does this in an intelligent, informative, and interesting manner.

GRACE RUSSO BULLARO is an assistant professor at CUNY, Lehman College. She recently published an edited volume on the cinema of Roberto Benigni, and is currently at work on a study of Lina Wertmuller.

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Derek Jarman and Lyric Film: The Mirror and the Sea

By Steven Dillon. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004. $55.00 cloth; $22.95 paper. 271 pages.

Derek Jarman's brief and incandescent career in the cinema is ably documented in Dillon's new book, which covers Jarman's career in roughly chronological order, with biographical information interspersed with interpretations of Jarman's films. Beginning with a consideration of exactly what the term "lyric film" means, Dillon places Jarman's work in the tradition of Maya Deren, Jean Cocteau, Jean Genet, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Wim Wenders, and even D.W. Griffith—filmmakers who created their own poetic vision within the cinema, whether in a commercial or noncommercial context. Dillon's book is not a simple biography—there have already been several, including *Derek Jarman: A Biography* by Tony Peake, which is probably the last word on the filmmaker for the moment—but rather a meditation on Jarman's thematic obsessions as an artist, and his status as the major queer filmmaker of his generation.

Dillon deftly charts the course of Jarman's influences as a young filmmaker, and also deals with Jarman's poetry, in particular his volume of poems, *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth* (1972), published just four years before his first feature film, *Sebastiane* (1976). As Dillon argues, "the key to all of Jarman's works is the relationship between the mirror and the ocean. The mirror signals the replication of identity and models the desire for a like self . . . yet the mirror in the original myth of Narcissus is, in fact, water" (47-48). In his discussion of Jarman's short film *Art of Mirrors* (1973), Dillon shows how the preoccupations and themes of Jarman's poetry found cinematic expression in this piece, which "consists almost entirely of figures who hold the same round disc towards the camera and use it to reflect light back into the camera" (51), as if the human body were possessed with pulsating sexual energy, pushing back the limits of desire and representation.

This same fixation with light, mirrors, and reflecting surfaces can also be observed in Jarman's Super-8 home movies from the 1970s and 1980s, which the filmmaker collected, just before his death, in the 1994 film *Glitterbug,* released with a suitably shimmering Brian Eno soundtrack. *Glitterbug* is a gloriously sensuous film about being young, queer, and impoverished in London, while at the same time filled with the optimism of youth. There may be no money, but there is boundless ambition and a sense of limitless possibilities; this is the raw material from which Jarman would construct his visual world. While working on scenarios for various films, many of which would never be made—such as *The Bees of Infinity,* a contemplation of the cinematic vision of Jean Cocteau (59)—Jarman found work as a set designer on two of Ken Russell's most extravagant films, *The Devils* (1971) and *Savage Messiah* (1972), which allowed him free reign to design elaborate sets and earned him a handsome salary. With *Sebastiane,* Jarman finally plunged into feature direction himself, creating an entirely new cinematic language for his films, a forthright enunciation of queer desire.

After reviewing Jarman's beginnings as a filmmaker, Dillon then considers three early features, *The Tempest* (1979), *Jubilee* (1977), and *Sebastiane* (1976), noting that *Sebastiane*'s historical importance resides partly in the fact that it was the first gay-themed independent feature film produced in Britain to get a commercial release, and also in the fact that, in Jarman's words, "*Sebastiane* didn't present homosexuality as a problem and this was what made it different from all the British films that preceded it. It was also homoerotic" (63). Peter Wollen commented that another distinguishing feature of the film was its dialogue track, spoken entirely in Latin, seemingly stripped away from the visuals. For Wollen, this separation of word and image suggested that Jarman was more comfortable with images than words, and favored

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using "preexisting literary texts," as he did in *The Tempest, The Angelic Conversation* (1985), and the later *War Requiem* (1989), rather than his own scripts.

Indeed, in his discussion of Jarman's *The Angelic Conversation* and *War Requiem,* Dillon makes the point that there is a marked dislocation of sound in each film that makes the visual track stand out from the finished film, and also that the sound that accompanies the images in both films is often asynchronous. Arguing that "*The Angelic Conversation* is perhaps the purest example of lyric cinema in Jarman's oeuvre," Dillon notes that "the images before us focus on two male lovers to the exclusion of almost anything else. There is little plot, only segments and episodes with different moods and atmosphere" (101). A generation earlier, the pioneering queer American filmmaker Andy Warhol would use much the same method to construct his most sensuous narrative films, instructing his scenarist, Ronald Tavel, that he was not interested in plot, but in incident. The visuals in both Warhol's *Chelsea Girls* (1966) and Jarman's *The Angelic Conversation* are the real fabric that holds both films together; the words exist as a separate track that is often of incidental importance.

This visual trance imagery extends to Jarman's most popular and perhaps most accessible work, *Caravaggio* (1968), which received a wide commercial release, was shot in the relative luxury of 35mm and, according to Jarman, was the first film "in which I have developed the acting parts and bowed to narrative; a necessity imposed by the situation and a reflection of Caravaggio's style" (132). The film is nonetheless composed of a series of stunningly lush visuals, and Dillon argues that in *Caravaggio,* "the mirror of gold" (132) is the most persistent visual motif. In painting his life, and the lives of those around him, Caravaggio is creating a seemingly endless series of mirrors that capture and valorize his friends and his work. As with Jarman's earlier films, the use of mirror images abounds, and yet "the reflections of light in *Caravaggio* take on unique resonances and associations with respect to Jarman's other work, insofar as they are now linked immediately with the glittering purse and the shining coin" which Caravaggio uses to pay his models (147).

The Last of England (1988) and *The Garden* (1990) represent for Dillon "Jarman's most original and lasting contributions to the lyric cinema" (162). *The Last of England* is a series of "set pieces with no dialogue" which nevertheless mesh more securely with the soundtrack that accompanies them; as Jarman notes, the film "works with image and sound, a language which is nearer to poetry than prose" (163). *The Last of England* is also a film in which the director foregrounds himself, appearing in his studio at the start of the film, writing in his notebooks. Throughout the film, Jarman's presence is felt both as the author of the images within the work, but also as an industrious artistic presence; writing, painting, and culling the images that comprise *The Last of England*'s visual tapestry. Noting that "my own feeling at the moment is as if some mega-production were going off-screen, perhaps life itself, and I'm traveling through, documenting it," Jarman's use of his home movies within the text of the film suggests that he is working to create his life into a work of art itself, whether or not a film is being made.

Jarman's last films, *Edward II* (1991), *Wittgenstein* (1993), and *Blue* (1993), represent a dark coda to the director's work as the effects of HIV/AIDS became more pronounced. Jarman was forced to work with a "ghost director" on his version of *Edward II* simply because he was often too unwell to film (Jarman's shooting diary of the filming of *Edward II* is an invaluable document in this regard). By the time of *Wittgenstein,* Jarman was barely able to see—an ironic conclusion for a life lived in the light, obsessed with mirrors and images, and dedicated to creating a visual world for the queer spirit. *Blue,* famously, is simply a limpid color blue that fills the screen for the entire duration of the film's running time, while Jarman rages against the dying of his own personal light (his vision) on the soundtrack. They are all angry films, as the last photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, another visionary queer artist, are equally distraught. These films represent Jarman's personal confrontation with mortality, and his opposition to a society that would repress the mechanisms of queer desire.

Dillon's book is a superbly considered, deftly illustrated, and meticulously researched work, which persuasively argues that light, one's image in a mirror, and the endless embrace of the sea's own reflective surface form the key touchstones for a deeper understanding of Jarman's work. In his preface to the shooting diary of *Edward II,* Jarman noted that "it is difficult enough to be queer, but to be queer in the cinema is almost impossible. Heterosexuals have fucked up the screen so completely that there's hardly room for us to kiss there" (203). It was clearing away this space that was Jarman's life's work, and Dillon's book is a fitting testament to Jarman's success in creating an alternative cinema—in which queer desire is foregrounded, rather than marginalized. As a sensitive and intelligent look at Jarman's films, Dillon's book is essential reading, and offers a compelling examination of the life and work of one of the cinema's most gifted artists, who created a new world for himself and his peers, a world of light, reflection, and desire.

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The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom

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It is not an exaggeration to say that Walt Disney has been, and continues to be one of the most influential people in the world. Without even considering the financial empire that Disney represents, we can point to an even more fundamental power—that of shaping minds and perhaps even character. While idolized by countless people who still cherish their

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childhood memories of Bambi and Cinderella, he has been declared "Hollywood's Dark Prince" by others.

In the introduction to *The Emperor's Old Groove*, Ayres and Susan Hines ask a crucial question: "Why in the world are we still watching Disney?" To establish a critical context for the present volume, they provide an overview of previous works on the subject, with an eye to tracing the attitudes that critics and scholars have brought to their study of the Disney empire, and the body of films and television productions on which it is founded. The dozen or so titles named show that there is no shortage of studies on the subject. What Hines and Ayres take exception to in most of the existing literature about Disney is the dearth of negative criticism.

Their book, they clearly imply, will be different principally in two regards. The first is that it will reveal how "calculated that [Disney] 'magic' has been" by demonstrating that "Disney's animated films for children are at the center of its ideological hegemony and capitalist expansion"; indeed, that the Disney empire is founded on and perpetuated by its "intent of selling to children" (3). Additionally, while most previous critical collections have offered mainly broad discussions of various aspects of the Disney empire or its body of film and television productions, this one will include only close readings of individual feature films that target children.

The first essay, Ayres' "The Wonderful World of Disney," sets the tone for the volume, arguing that Disney products "colonize" generations of children and their parents to accept the ideal of Disney's own family background: "Midwestern, white middle-class, all-American, apple pie, Bible on the coffee table, anti-intellectual, heterosexual, nuclear family" (16). Furthermore, Ayres proclaims that Disney productions encourage viewers to regard anyone who does not conform to this idea as "inferior or evil," and concludes that "the Disneyfication of children, then, is empire building, complete with an imperialistic colonizing force that effects either conformity to the ideal or denigration of the Other" (17). Virtually all of the subsequent essays go on to illustrate the ways in which this denigration, colonizing, and cultural appropriation take place in various films.

In her essay, Ayres draws heavily on Disney's biography in order to illuminate key themes in animated films. This, as we know, is always a dubious approach to hermeneutics. In this case, it also reads like pop psychology. To say that "Disney felt a lack of love and acceptance from his father" and then to offer this as the reason why in such films as *Pinocchio, Mary Poppins,* and *Peter Pan* "children search for an effective father" (20) is beyond trite, it is also reductionist. Ayres' statement that Disney's perpetuation of negative black stereotypes is "notorious" (20) may be true, but to then attribute to him the negative racial stereotypes existing in *The Lion King* and *Aladdin,* two films that the author acknowledges were made after Disney's death, seems to stretch the boundaries of fair play. This approach is taken up in the next essay as well, by Mark Axelrod, who uses Disney's doubt about his true parentage as a filter through which to read the themes of the abandoned child and the absence of the mother figure in so many of the animated films.

In another essay by Ayres, "The Poisonous Apple in *Snow White:* Disney's Kingdom of Gender," she analyzes this fairy tale from a feminist perspective, drawing parallels first between Disney's and the Grimms' versions, and afterwards between Disney's film and recent productions that she believes are reactions to Disney's *Snow White.* Predictably, Ayres argues that Disney "promotes any source of female empowerment as evil" (43), and concludes by naming recent animated films such as *Aladdin, Mulan* and *Pocahontas* as sexist and xenophobic (49), declaring that the purpose of the "Disney apparatus" is that of "swaying children to conform to Victorian Western notions of gender behavior" (40).

One of the essays in this collection that, although still critical of the pervasive stereotyping that the author sees in the film, nevertheless manages to eschew the strident Disney-bashing is "Disney's Magic Carpet Ride: *Aladdin* and the Women in Islam," by Christiane Staninger. The author argues that Princess Jasmine's clothing, speech, and values all contribute to making her a typical California teen of the 1990s in the trappings of an Arab princess and *Aladdin* a propaganda movie for Western imperialism. Although this sounds like more of the overdetermined and emotional criticism that we have seen in the previous essays, Staninger nevertheless manages to problematize Western conceptions of the feminine role in Arab countries by referencing works by Arab feminists, demonstrating that the submissiveness believed by many to be an integral part of the Qu'ran is actually a result of a specific oral tradition (the *hadith*) that was used to suppress women's rights. While this problematizing of the issue is commendable, the author's tergiversations regarding women's position in the Arab world weaken her argument, for while one moment she is proving to us that women have indeed enjoyed power throughout the centuries, the next moment she offers an explanation of how the *hadith* ended up suppressing their rights.

Staninger's is one of a cluster of essays on *Aladdin.* Another, "The Politics of Vision: Disney, *Aladdin* and the Gulf War," is by Dianne Sachko McCleod. As the title suggests, the author draws parallels between the politics of the film and of the Gulf War. The unprecedented television coverage that the war received, principally on CNN, meant that *Aladdin* played to an audience "already primed by the media" to believe negative stereotypes of Arabs that the film "mirrored and magnified" (179). McCleod compares the imperialistic U.S.A. that fought the Gulf War ostensibly to liberate the freedom-loving Kuwaitis but in reality to protect its oil interests, to Disney and his hypocritical attempts to maintain a wholesome image while also producing R-rated movies under different labels. This might be a valid argument if Disney had claimed to be some sort of non-profit organization with a mission to improve humankind. However, as Ms. McCleod no doubt knows, Disney is a business empire with a mission to produce a profit for its shareholders.

In the epilogue we hear once again from Brenda Ayres, who confesses that she feels guilty bashing Disney, but then proceeds to do so, confusing the readers by oscillating between reiterating the charges that she has already made and

urging us to remember that no man or corporation can "depict a morality that is politically correct and acceptable to all of us" (194).

There is no doubt that the subject of this book is a valid one. Disney's portrayals of people and their world need to be reevaluated as society's standards and values change. However, this cause would have been better served had the contributors to *The Emperor's Old Groove* demonstrated more objectivity and detachment and less emotional investment. In addition, a collection of essays ought not to be monopolized by its editor—neither quantitatively, by contributing too much material, nor qualitatively, by projecting an overly forceful tone. Brenda Ayres does both, and thereby destroys the conceptual and structural balance that an edited volume should possess.

GRACE RUSSO BULLARO is an assistant professor at CUNY, Lehman College; she has just published an edited volume on the cinema of Roberto Benigni and is working on a book about Lina Wertmuller.

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The Fifties: Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959

By Peter Lev. New York: Scribners, 2000. $99.00. 328 pages.

To my mind, it's unfortunate that Scribners' ambitious project to offer an encyclopedic history of American film should come to its last publication with Peter Lev's contribution on the 1950s. For *Film Quarterly*, I've reviewed nine out of ten of the volumes in this ground-breaking series, and Lev's strikes me as the weakest. Fifties films are a fascinating blend of ideological apology, formal wackiness, interrogation of established social and gender roles, and stylistic excess and stridency. It is still shocking to realize how little studied the cinema of the period has been. Only slowly has analysis of 50s cinema emerged from under the shadow of political conformity (as summed up in Peter Biskind's influential *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* [1983]) to engage with the richness of social perspective, cultural representation, and aesthetic investigation so evident in the films of the time. Lev's book, which conforms to the most standard and unchallenging rendition of cinema in the decade, is little but a squandered opportunity.

Several factors appear to have contributed to the conventionality of Peter Lev's reading of the 1950s and its films. First, he appears to have taken too much to heart the mandate to write an encyclopedic work that would offer up basic facts and traditional analyses. In the last paragraph of his introduction, he pointedly declares that his book "is a reference history of a decade of American film" that "tries to balance an overview of the film industry with a discussion of representative films" (6). The result is a predictability that has not always been on show in other Scribners volumes, where the delivery of solid history has been accompanied by bold assertion and consequential insight. Think, for instance, of the first volume in the series—Charles Musser's *The Emergence of Cinema*—which nicely fulfilled the needs of a reference work and yet made a stunning and far-reaching argument about the productiveness of seeing cinema's trajectory as part of a longer and broader history of screen practices. Think, too, of the ways that argument was then balanced by Stephen Prince's striking last volume of the series—*A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood Under the Electronic Rainbow*—which examined how the cinema that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century was now in danger of disappearing at century's end within a convergence of new screen media that promised to amalgamate everything to the condition of digitality.

Put another way, the best volumes in the Scribners series give the basic material, but make one think about them in new ways. Rarely does this happen in Lev's account. Overall, he presents the sort of story we've always been told about the American film industry in the 1950s: how the business of commercial filmmaking underwent various crises as it faced challenges derived from the divorce of exhibition from production; from the advent of television; from the break-up of the system of long-term contracts for talent, and so on; and how one "solution" was the rise of independent productions in which the classic studios often served as little more than brokers and distributors.

Lev also appears to have been hampered by another specific mandate of this particular venture in encyclopedic history: namely, to remain close to films and the industry that produced them and not to venture into the seemingly less objectively analyzable question of the culture they derive from. Overall, the Scribners volumes have not been strong on social or cultural history, and the omission is telling for the 1950s, when so much of what is going on in the films seems a response to, or reworking of, contextual issues. There is little or no mention of suburbia, of the rise of new social and sexual identities, of 1950s sociology and the rethinking of work and status, of the explosion of forms of leisure culture—the list goes on. True, the volume discusses HUAC and the Red Scare —in the form of a special chapter contributed by Brian Neve—but it tends to concentrate only on those aspects of the witch hunt that directly affected the Hollywood industry. True, too, another special contribution—Victoria O'Donnell's chapter, "Science Fiction Films and Cold War Anxiety" —does set out to read films against a social backdrop, but it is marred by a simple reflectionism in which it is assumed that 50s films (big studio productions and cheap exploitation work alike) can be interpreted as easy and direct allegories of worries of the moment.

Another reason for the lack of spark in Lev's account of 1950s cinema is hinted at in the volume's subtitle: "Transforming the Screen." The impression one gets from the subtitle and the body of the volume is that, for Lev, 50s cinema is little more than a transitional form, important merely for the ways it stands between classical cinema and its full break-up into post-classical forms. There is little recognition of the films of the period as interesting stylistic ventures and cultural representations in their own right: Lev seems strangely disengaged from his material, as if he sees it merely as preparation for the more interesting cinematic work to follow.

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Thus, his chapter "Genre and Production Trends, 1950-1954" begins with a few paragraphs of conventional description of "sociopolitical tensions" of the time, but never really uses that context in the analysis of genres and trends. Instead, individual sections of the chapter end up rehashing commonplaces (e.g., "American film noir, which flourished in the 1940s and 1950s, is distinguished by dark visuals and stories of corruption, betrayal, and violence" [41]) and then offering short commentaries on select films that readily embody the themes and style of the genre. Except for the melodramatic films of Douglas Sirk, Lev tends to stick with the least weird or garish or cartoonish or excessive examples of trends and genres: this is a history of 50s film in which a number of figures who increasingly seem necessary to understand the period—for example, Frank Tashlin, Sam Fuller, and Jerry Lewis (let alone Ed Wood and the entire tradition of exploitation cinema)—are given little or no mention.

It is to Greg S. Faller's credit that in the contribution he makes to the volume (the chapter "Experimental Film in the 1950s"), he explicitly avoids the rhetoric of transition and sets out to treat avant-garde cinema of the time as a full-fledged set of formal strategies and a distinct mode of production. As Faller puts it in the opening line of his chapter, "Often considered merely a transitional phase between the excitement of the avant-garde cinema of the 1940s and the alternative film culture of the 1960s, the 1950s instead deserves recognition as a crucial period in the development of a vital American experimental cinema" (280). Faller cogently details the infrastructure that supported this cinema (for example: new journals, film festivals, university art-cinema circuits, cinémathèques, distribution companies, and so on) and analyzes key trends in experimental filmmaking with a balanced discussion of individual auteurs and generic trends within the avant-garde.

Likewise, in a chapter on documentary filmmaking, Jack C. Ellis admits that theatrically distributed documentary cinema tended to decline in importance in the 1950s (with the notable exception of the ideologically escapist Disney True-Life Adventures). But Ellis doesn't then assume that the 1950s were a documentary vacuum. Quite the contrary; in Ellis's analysis, the relative disappearance of the theatrical documentary was more than compensated for by non-theatrical distribution networks that brought films to schools and by the rise of television documentary that took up the slack of popular documentary shown commercially in movie theaters.

Both Faller and Ellis offer energetic reckonings with important modes of filmmaking. Theirs are lively accounts of the institutions and of the films. In contrast, Lev's study of the cinematic mainstream seems lackluster and distant, as if he felt little engagement with the decade and its cultural output. Obviously, though, his pages dominate the volume insofar as the contributions by other authors on non-Hollywood cinema are presented virtually as end-of-the-book afterthoughts.

No doubt the typical destiny for the Scribners volumes will be to end up as a row of reference works in libraries or the personal collections of film scholars. In the best of cases, they can go beyond this destiny to offer productive new ways of conceptualizing American film history. Unfortunately, the conventionality of Lev's study means that his volume on a most interesting decade of cinematic work will likely remain on the shelf, unconsulted or at best dipped into quickly for little more than the random, standard fact.

DANA POLAN teaches in Cinema Studies at NYU. He is the author, most recently, of *The Sopranos,* forthcoming in Duke University Press's new "Spin-offs" series on television shows.

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Hollywood Economics: How Extreme Uncertainty Shapes the Film Industry

By Arthur De Vany. New York: Routledge, 2003. $165.00 cloth; $43.95 paper. 448 pages.

The Hollywood film industry enjoys the peculiar status of being one of the most visible businesses in the U.S.—due to the very public nature of its product and its inherent need for publicity—while at the same time being among the most secretive in terms of its actual corporate practices. Although the public continually sees reports of budgets, salaries, and box-office grosses, these are reported not infrequently in sporting-event style (Which film is in first place? Who is the most highly paid star in Hollywood?). In most cases, the numbers given are, like Hollywood's product itself, almost entirely fictitious. One need only ask a producer waiting for his studio-distributed film to enter net profit to hear tales of labyrinthine bookkeeping methods that make oversight, even by those engaged in the process, nearly impossible.

The famous observation of William Goldman that in Hollywood "nobody knows anything" was originally applied to questions of screenwriting and project development, but the phrase clearly has broader industrial implications as well. It is not surprising, then, that this mantra serves as a regular refrain in Arthur De Vany's *Hollywood Economics: How Extreme Uncertainty Shapes the Film Industry,* a book that is immediately impressive for its construction of complex models that attempt to explain the business practices of the Hollywood studios. De Vany, a research fellow in economics at the University of California, Irvine, and a consultant to the movie industry, offers an intriguing analysis of the workings of the American box office, complete with tables, graphs, and mathematical formulae that lend an aura of empiricism to his conclusions about genre, stars, release patterns, ratings, contracts, and movie-related legislation. Among De Vany's more surprising assertions are the ideas that stars do not have enough impact on film earnings to justify their extravagant salaries and profit participation; that Hollywood makes more R-rated movies than is financially prudent; and that the Paramount Decrees of 1948 were a terrible miscarriage of justice. Although De Vany's use of mathematical models offers ostensibly objective proof of such contentions, an applied un-

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derstanding of film history and industrial practice reveals many of the book's arguments to be flawed.

The central problem is De Vany's failure to take into account the full range of revenue streams generated by feature films, which includes broadcast television, cable television, home video (both tape and DVD), pay-per-view in homes and hotel rooms, licensing and merchandising, soundtrack sales, toys and related ancillary products, and—most significantly—foreign theatrical and video rights. Early in the book, De Vany discusses big-budget, heavily promoted films for which "the theatrical market (which we have studied here) can be less important than these other sources of revenue [DVD, foreign, cable, etc.]." The fundamental importance of what were once considered secondary markets is not only true for the type of film De Vany is specifically referring to here, but for *all* films at this point. Therefore, while many of the book's conclusions about the financial impact of stars or the relationship between ratings and revenue are interesting, they are based on a small and decreasingly significant portion of a film's total value.

If De Vany had limited his theses to issues that exclusively concern domestic theatrical exhibition, there would be no complaint; however, without the entire revenue picture, there is simply no way to conclude (as he does in chapter 5) that Hollywood makes too many R-rated movies. The slight statistical disadvantage he finds in the domestic box office is offset by the film's increased value in the cable, video rental, and foreign markets, which account for more and more of a film's profits. A marketing person who recently left Warner Bros. told me that they quietly refer to a film's U.S. theatrical release as a "trailer," meaning that it is seen as advertising for the film's entry into more lucrative secondary markets. In this regard, the aspect of film consumption on which De Vany constructs all of his hypotheses is one that is becoming less important as a revenue source and more vital as a marketing tool.

De Vany's conclusions deviate further from any pretense of objective analysis when he ponders the possibility that "the skill or talent necessary to produce G, PG, and PG-13-rated movies may be rarer than the skill needed to produce R-rated movies." The idea that somehow it takes less talent to make engaging, entertaining films containing sex and violence than those that feature animal antics and adorable moppets is in no way supported by any of the mathematical models presented here, and is frankly absurd. Ratings and talent simply cannot be statistically correlated. For his conclusion to chapter 5, De Vany borrows Michael Medved's spurious argument that the core of this surplus R-rated picture problem is the selfishness of Hollywood's cultural elite (yes, those rascals again), who just want to make their violent, sexually deviant movies in flagrant disregard of industry and audience, and who have hijacked film production, leading to lower revenues for studios and producers. As though there are only two possible explanations for the author's statistical evidence that (based on domestic box-office figures), Hollywood makes too many R-rated movies, he contrasts Medved's position with Hollywood's oft-repeated contention that the production system "gives the people what they want." De Vany claims that his results reject Hollywood's perspective and "come close to confirming Medved's hypothesis." Obviously, it would be impossible to prove Medved's ideas absent an in-depth sociological analysis of the film industry. The statistical correlation of box-office figures to film ratings presented here ignores the underlying industrial dynamics that produce this situation. For De Vany to imply otherwise only serves to expose his own ideological skew and his lack of understanding of the movie business.

Among other glaring problems here are De Vany's repeated reference to "good" films and "bad" films, with his sole qualitative criterion being box-office performance. By this measure, two of the best films of the 1940s are the sex-hygiene film *Mom and Dad*, and the military musical *This Is the Army*, while *Citizen Kane* and *Casablanca* fail to make the top ten. His observations that films have short economic shelf lives and that in the movie business "experience and learning, which are predictors of success on average, are not closely related to outcomes because success depends on doing something different" are equally and obviously flawed. However, it is evident from De Vany's discussion that the movie business requires its own economic model—one that takes into account the multiplicity of revenue streams that make up the marketplace for films, one that factors in the length of time over which the picture can be sold, one that does not attempt to offer vague qualitative judgments about the films themselves without some clear method of evaluation, and one that is not an advertisement for the author's consulting services.

De Vany might have failed on all the above counts, but in doing so he has pointed film scholarship in an important direction, or at the very least issued a serious challenge to fellow historians and economists. A fusion of theoretical economics, chaos math, legal history, and moving pictures creates an exciting synthetic description. The thoroughly interdisciplinary nature of De Vany's work, with its equal emphases on theory and production, provides a model that fosters a cross-pollination of ideas from multiple areas of study, and collapses some walls within a highly segregated discipline.

EVAN LIEBERMAN teaches film studies at Emory University. He is a filmmaker with several feature films to his credit and is the co-author, with David Cook, of the forthcoming book from Oxford University Press, *The Moving Image: Language, Industry, and Culture*.

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ERRATUM

We regret that due to an editing error, the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph of Mary Desjardins' review of *Ruth Harriet Louise and Hollywood Glamour Photography* (*FQ* vol. 59, no. 2, page 77) should have read:

It may have been different from Louise's way of capturing "personality," but Hurrell was certainly capturing something of Harlow that "objectification" would be inadequate as a descriptor.

derstanding of film history and industrial practice reveals many of the book's arguments to be flawed.

The central problem is De Vany's failure to take into account the full range of revenue streams generated by feature films, which includes broadcast television, cable television, home video (both tape and DVD), pay-per-view in homes and hotel rooms, licensing and merchandising, soundtrack sales, toys and related ancillary products, and—most significantly—foreign theatrical and video rights. Early in the book, De Vany discusses big-budget, heavily promoted films for which "the theatrical market (which we have studied here) can be less important than these other sources of revenue [DVD, foreign, cable, etc.]." The fundamental importance of what were once considered secondary markets is not only true for the type of film De Vany is specifically referring to here, but for *all* films at this point. Therefore, while many of the book's conclusions about the financial impact of stars or the relationship between ratings and revenue are interesting, they are based on a small and decreasingly significant portion of a film's total value.

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De Vany's conclusions deviate further from any pretense of objective analysis when he ponders the possibility that "the skill or talent necessary to produce G, PG, and PG-13-rated movies may be rarer than the skill needed to produce R-rated movies." The idea that somehow it takes less talent to make engaging, entertaining films containing sex and violence than those that feature animal antics and adorable moppets is in no way supported by any of the mathematical models presented here, and is frankly absurd. Ratings and talent simply cannot be statistically correlated. For his conclusion to chapter 5, De Vany borrows Michael Medved's spurious argument that the core of this surplus R-rated picture problem is the selfishness of Hollywood's cultural elite (yes, those rascals again), who just want to make their violent, sexually deviant movies in flagrant disregard of industry and audience, and who have hijacked film production, leading to lower revenues for studios and producers. As though there are only two possible explanations for the author's statistical evidence that (based on domestic box-office figures), Hollywood makes too many R-rated movies, he contrasts Medved's position with Hollywood's oft-repeated contention that the production system "gives the people what they want." De Vany claims that his results reject Hollywood's perspective and "come close to confirming Medved's hypothesis." Obviously, it would be impossible to prove Medved's ideas absent an in-depth sociological analysis of the film industry. The statistical correlation of box-office figures to film ratings presented here ignores the underlying industrial dynamics that produce this situation. For De Vany to imply otherwise only serves to expose his own ideological skew and his lack of understanding of the movie business.

Among other glaring problems here are De Vany's repeated reference to "good" films and "bad" films, with his sole qualitative criterion being box-office performance. By this measure, two of the best films of the 1940s are the sex-hygiene film *Mom and Dad*, and the military musical *This Is the Army*, while *Citizen Kane* and *Casablanca* fail to make the top ten. His observations that films have short economic shelf lives and that in the movie business "experience and learning, which are predictors of success on average, are not closely related to outcomes because success depends on doing something different" are equally and obviously flawed. However, it is evident from De Vany's discussion that the movie business requires its own economic model—one that takes into account the multiplicity of revenue streams that make up the marketplace for films, one that factors in the length of time over which the picture can be sold, one that does not attempt to offer vague qualitative judgments about the films themselves without some clear method of evaluation, and one that is not an advertisement for the author's consulting services.

De Vany might have failed on all the above counts, but in doing so he has pointed film scholarship in an important direction, or at the very least issued a serious challenge to fellow historians and economists. A fusion of theoretical economics, chaos math, legal history, and moving pictures creates an exciting synthetic description. The thoroughly interdisciplinary nature of De Vany's work, with its equal emphases on theory and production, provides a model that fosters a cross-pollination of ideas from multiple areas of study, and collapses some walls within a highly segregated discipline.

EVAN LIEBERMAN teaches film studies at Emory University. He is a filmmaker with several feature films to his credit and is the co-author, with David Cook, of the forthcoming book from Oxford University Press, *The Moving Image: Language, Industry, and Culture*.

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ERRATUM

We regret that due to an editing error, the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph of Mary Desjardins' review of *Ruth Harriet Louise and Hollywood Glamour Photography* (*FQ* vol. 59, no. 2, page 77) should have read:

It may have been different from Louise's way of capturing "personality," but Hurrell was certainly capturing something of Harlow that "objectification" would be inadequate as a descriptor.

The Horror Film

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Prince and Schneider impose strict generic frameworks upon these two anthologies. Prince takes a broad historical approach, drawing together six reprinted and seven original essays, along with 35 illustrative images, to "address basic questions about the genre—the characteristics of horror across different historical periods, for example—in addition to important issues that are seldom examined in the scholarly film studies literature . . . includ[ing] the appeals of horror to viewers of different age groups" (5). By contrast, Schneider's collection of 14 mostly original essays presents a focused debate regarding psychoanalytic film theory and horror. Schneider advocates what Richard Allen calls a "culturally embedded, interpretive use of psychoanalysis" (quoted in Schneider, 12). Such a practice, he argues, moves away from the universalizing tendencies of psychoanalytic theorists who engage in "Grand Theory": it historicizes the use of psychoanalytic thought within certain eras, film industries, and genres, as well as allowing for the possibility that psychoanalysis may not be an appropriate model, or the only appropriate model, for analyzing many films. Schneider conceived the book as one that engages in "self-conscious theorizing" and "responds to the need for critical dialogue among psychoanalytic horror film scholars and those of other theoretical and disciplinary stripes" (5).

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Part Two is anchored by a lengthy piece on postmodern horror from Isabel Cristina Piñedo that serves as an excellent introduction to post-1960 horror as well as to the remainder of the volume, including essays by Prince and Schneider. Jonathan Crane argues for the influence of Herschel Gordon Lewis's "splatter antiaesthetic" on later horror, if only for its treatment of the human body as meat. "As his broken horror films stagger from one narrative or technical lapse to another they inevitably return to a close-up engagement with battered, dripping flesh" (160). Crane's allusion to horror's nonnarrative pleasures serves as segue into Mikita Brottman's fascinating discussion of the Mondo film, a subgenre of compilation films that depict murders, suicides, accidents, and assassinations which has garnered a massive underground following. In the collection's weakest essay, Cynthia Freeland considers *The Sixth Sense*, *The Blair Witch Project*, and *Signs* to be harbingers of a new aesthetic of uneasy suspense—"art dread"—but offers little analysis of viewer investment in atmospheric horror and no explanation for the supposed turn from gore and graphic violence (a claim implicitly disputed by Stephen Prince in his essay on violence in the Schneider collection). Freeland's unsatisfying conclusions merely state the obvious: "A strong response of dread and horror [at the end of *The Blair Witch Project*] requires empathy with the lead characters" (198). Caroline J.S. Picart and David A. Frank expand the reach of the genre by examining gothic visual tropes in *Schindler's List*.

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From 1958 until 1988, the Soviet-appointed regime of János Kádár undertook the long and patient process of transforming

Hungary into the most open, stable, and "prosperous" country of the Soviet Bloc. Kádár paid lip service to his Soviet bosses, while offering Hungarians the cultural and social benefits of state socialism without its more serious side effects. That special but steady diet was particularly nurturing to Hungarian cinema, whose growth had been regularly undermined and stunted by the country's chronic instability and culturally conservative climate. During those 30 years, Hungarian cinema established a consistent presence on the international film map.

Unfortunately, John Cunningham underrepresents this paramount period of Hungarian cinema, devoting to it barely one-fourth of *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffee House to Multiplex*. He defends this imbalance, claiming that major directors such as Marta Mészáros, Miklós Jancsó, and István Szabó have been "amply covered by other writers," and that space constraints force him to limit his discussion of many other directors (3). Both explanations, however, prove to be convenient excuses not to engage in any meaningful assessment or reexamination of individual films or individual directors. Cunningham's goal may be a historical overview of Hungarian cinema, but there is no reason it could not have been 50 pages longer to allow for some extended analyses and genuine interpretations. Instead, striving for some elusive quantitative comprehensiveness, Cunningham spends too much of his energy summarizing plots and critical reviews of too many films. This labor conveniently prevents him from devoting further and deeper attention to the work of, say, Károly Makk or Péter Gothár, or discussing the contributions of newer directors such as former cinematographer Tamás Sas (absent from the index) or well-known actor András Kern, let alone Péter Timár, György Pálfi (not mentioned at all), or Ibolya Fekete (also missing from the index), whose films need both commercial and critical publicity. There are also curious inequities in the coverage of the better-known filmmakers. The most famous of them, István Szabó, gets short shrift, and Cunningham's bibliography, contrary to his assertions, fails to list much of the available criticism on Szabó's work. Such omissions in the age of search engines and comprehensive databases are inexcusable. At the same time, Zoltán Fábri, a prolific older but lesser director, receives detailed and caring treatment. Regarding Miklós Jancsó, Cunningham insists we should know about all of the director's post-1970s productions—all irritatingly portentous, in my opinion. Yet, when reviewing the later work of Marta Mészáros, Jancsó's one-time wife, Cunningham ignores some of her lesser-known but infinitely more substantial films such as *Bye, Bye, Red Riding Hood; Fetus;* or *Daughters of Luck*.

There is no question, then, that given its scope and singularity, Cunningham's book delivers less than it could have and should have, missing the opportunity to advance the study of Hungarian cinema beyond a survey history of its film industry. That said, however, there is also plenty to celebrate about what the book is and does. *Hungarian Cinema* will not disappoint film and cultural historians. It is thoroughly documented and often vividly written. It is also, despite its weaknesses, the most comprehensive and most reliable English-language review of Hungarian cinema to date. The earlier ones on the subject are either seriously dated and selective (Graham Petrie's *History Must Answer to Man* [1978]) or historically very sketchy and unreliable (Bryan Burns's *Hungary* [1994]).

Cunningham has had a very long affair with Hungary, having lived and taught there for many years. His intimate knowledge of Hungarian culture and his considerable familiarity with the language allow him to ground the book in primary sources (such as Nemeskürty's unabridged history of Hungarian film and the archives of the Hungarian Film Institute), materials not directly available to his predecessors. His use of Hungarian film journals and magazines (such as *Filmvilág* and *Filmspiral*) exposes an often striking dissonance between the praises routinely bestowed on Hungarian films by foreign critics attending international festivals and the typically lukewarm and levelheaded reactions these films receive at home.

The chapters covering the first 60 years of the Hungarian film industry, from its birth through the late 1950s, are fascinating reading. They record a remarkable survival of a national cinema plagued by two world wars, two failed revolutions (1919, 1956), and a Fascist and Communist terror, each of which forced a massive exodus of its most talented artists, including gifted filmmakers (most notably Pál Fejös, István Szöts, and Géza Radványi). Cunningham's discussions of their best films (*Spring Shower, People of the Mountains*, and *Somewhere in Europe,* respectively) and their sadly compromised careers show thoughtful appreciation for their accomplishments during that otherwise undistinguished record of Hungarian filmmaking.

Unfortunately, just as Cunningham turns to the blossoming and blooming years of Hungarian cinema, his book begins to lose momentum. It's as if having to shift focus from historical to cinematic considerations in order to sort out this steady crop of distinguished films tempered Cunningham's scholarly edge. Even though the writing remains mostly engaging, it is now less effective, because the author squanders it on rushed and cursory film descriptions, relying on all sorts of statistics to manage his data, and a habit—so common to such surveys—of making inventories and cataloguing obscure and nondescript titles, all confirming my suspicions that Cunningham is most comfortable as a film historian and archivist and less so as a film scholar or critic (I do share, however, his disdain for contemporary film theory).

Gratefully, Cunningham is back in form to wrap up the book with a crisp six-page conclusion. Before we get there, though, we first have to endure his strained effort to make us appreciate Béla Tarr's brand of bleak minimalist cinema, especially the rarely seen (his earlier work is now available on Facets DVDs) and impenetrable seven-and-a-half-hour-long *Sátántangó* (1994). Cunningham also includes three special chapters, of which only the one that offers a convincing overview of the representations of Jews (and, briefly, Gypsies) in Hungarian cinema deserves inclusion in the book. Of the other two chapters, "Documentary, Animation, and the Avant-garde" is too short and general to have any value beyond calling attention to some titles and names and acknowledging that Hungarians did indeed make those types of

films. The third and shortest chapter (an "odd addition" in Cunningham's own words) simply doesn't warrant inclusion. It covers Hungarian films about soccer and the cultural impact of the game, but that commentary could have easily been integrated into the earlier parts of the book.

The documentation part of the book is a mixed bag as well. On the one hand, there are excellent notes full of informative explanations, elaborations, and fascinating digressions. On the other, there is a rather limited bibliography, strong on Hungarian sources but strangely incomplete when it comes to the primary ones in English, yet including such general entries as David Bordwell and Dudley Andrew on film theory and David Cook on film history. All the Hungarian films discussed in the book are alphabetically listed (with the director's names and dates of release) in a separate filmography, but since they are excluded from the index, there is regrettably no direct access to their discussions in the text. Finally, the two pages of Cunningham's resources for Hungarian cinema fail to provide what any English/Western reader would naturally expect to find there, namely, places where he/she could rent or purchase Hungarian films on DVD or VHS.

The book's conclusion is deliberately inconclusive, as Cunningham refuses to speculate about the future of Hungarian cinema, but judging by its past resilience and its current energy, its survival seems assured. The growth and success of domestic commercial cinema on one hand and the country's commitment and ability to fund such extremely radical projects as Tarr's, on the other, are signs the film industry and culture are in good health. Not bad for a country not much larger than Maine and with a population of just over ten million.

Judging by the newest sociological trends in cinema (strangely unacknowledged in Cunningham's conclusion), European and American audiences, especially in urban areas, are increasingly sharing their time between multiplexes and the ever-growing number of seasonal film fests and other celebrations of cinema. Such trends will benefit small national cinemas as more people join film clubs and societies that take advantage of the decreasing costs of home and large-venue projection systems and a growing DVD market. Who knows? —in a decade or two, film culture may return to the coffee houses where it all began. For the time being, anyone interested in Hungarian cinema must first reach for Cunningham's book. Except for the invaluable on-line contributions to *Kinoeye* and *Central Europe Review*,, some of which are listed by Cunningham, no Anglo-American journal or trade magazine has even tried to keep up with developments in Hungarian cinema over the last decade. There is no doubt, therefore, that Cunningham has given us a very important book. It is just that someone else will have to write a more penetrating and revealing one.

TOMASZ WARCHOL teaches literature and film at Georgia Southern University. He directs three film programs, one on campus and two in Savannah, where he lives.

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Producing Dreams, Consuming Youth: Mexican Americans and Mass Culture

By Vicki Mayer. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003. $21.95. 220 pages.

Vicki Mayer's ethnographic study of the relationship between the media and the Mexican-American community in San Antonio reaffirms longstanding beliefs about mass culture and marginalized ethnicities. Ultimately, we see, Mexican Americans must, to some extent, divest themselves of their ethnicity to succeed in the mass media; and young Mexican Americans identify more with mass-produced images of Hispanic life than they do with life on their block. That said, Mayer's rich documentation of her experiences working in San Antonio's Mexican-American community, her detailed knowledge of the viewing, listening, and movie-going habits of the young Mexican Americans she met, and her scrupulous discussion of the positive developments she witnessed and of the almost insuperable difficulties faced by the grass-roots video project she worked on, all add previously unexamined information to the discussion. *Producing Dreams, Consuming Youth* is an enlightening foray into media-dominated America.

Mayer's knowledgeable history of the rise of a significant number of media professionals from within the Mexican-American community in San Antonio exposes a cultural narrative that is likely to be new to her readers. Her interviews with Mexican Americans working in San Antonio's advertising and television industries add to our practical understanding of ethnicity in the Southwest and the media in this country. However, Mayer's most captivating chapters concern her work with teenagers and young adults on a grass-roots video project sponsored by a local organization called San Antonio Cultural Arts (SACA). The voices of young working-class Mexican Americans attempting to make videos that will "express them" are striking. A clear sense of the homogenizing power of mass culture emerges from these pages, confirmed by the similarities between these marginalized young people and the privileged upper-middle-class students I taught in the Department of Film and Television at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. However, the San Antonio students lacked the capital for the technology to realize their network dreams. Predictably, because of the exigencies of their lives and the time-consuming, patient attempts made by Mayer and the other facilitators to steer them toward more original documentary projects, many plans for videos came to nothing. Nevertheless, through Mayer, we are privy to discussions that express the intense longing of the young people to have their say, as well as the captivating power that media fantasy holds for marginalized Americans.

Mayer's narrative of the history of one successful project — the completion of a video about the tradition of maintaining private religious altars in working-class Mexican-American neighborhoods—reveals the need for sensitivity to the various ways different groups in the United States manifest pride. Standing out from the production history of what turned out to be a very interesting documentary exploration are two

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issues: the determination of the young people that this not be just "another boring documentary," and the efforts of some of the most enthusiastic members of the crew to block the circulation of the finished video outside of their circle of family and friends. Much of the participants' anger at being treated as second-class citizens was channeled into a resistance to including English subtitles in the Spanish-language parts of the video. After the young video artists compromised by using both English and Spanish subtitles, two of them steadfastly refused to attend any of the public screenings of their video until they knew from the buzz of approval that they wouldn't be humiliated.

The fear of these young people that they might make a "boring" documentary will seem familiar to all media educators. According to Mayer, the SACA volunteers expressed a troubling refusal to learn habits that allow for a distanced and rational consideration of events. Like their privileged counterparts, the SACA volunteers embraced the flash of trendy MTV videos to such an extent that they were prone to ignoring thoughtful content in favor of style. The general decline of reason as a force in education is questioned further here in Mayer's discussion of the specific mass-media entertainment that most excited her young volunteers: made-in-Mexico telenovelas and popular music. In her extensive consideration of "Maria Isabel," a Mexican telenovela, and mass-marketed "boy bands," particularly *NSYNC, Mayer explores how the girls with whom she worked use the most excessively fantastic aspects of the media toward irrational, if generally positive, ends in working out their mature identities as women and Americans.

"Maria Isabel" is the story of a beautiful (of course) indigenous, rural Mexican girl who marries into an upper-class, urban Mexican family, and, after much suffering at the hands of her husband's snobbish relatives, finally succeeds in finding her place in his world. The Mexican-American girls Mayer worked with experienced pride in the beauty and importance of heroine Maria Isabel. She became a focus of identification because she was a woman successfully dealing with the conflicts inherent in living between two worlds (the Euro-American and the Mexican-American), which they also experience. At the same time, however, they felt removed from her in that they thought her "pretty," and they didn't think of themselves that way, primarily because of their media-influenced ideas about beauty. Interestingly, the girls Mayer interviewed for their responses were aware of, and reacted against, the telenovelas's sexism. Although they didn't lose interest in it, they were disappointed in both the hero and heroine at the closure of the story, which is where—in the Latino daytime drama, as in the American women's pictures of the 1940s—the heroine is typically reduced to her "proper" place. Add to this that the girls in Mayer's crew also thought Maria Isabel's husband too patriarchal and regretted that he was from a racist family. The intriguing complexity with which these girls related to the telenovela fantasy serves nicely to expand the literature about the tangled associations that characterize audience responses to mass fantasies.

Mayer goes on to suggest a crucial difference between the way the girls consume telenovelas and the way they consume popular music. The young women's engagement with the telenovela, she contends, satisfies their need to deal with their Mexican roots. Their enthusiasm for specific bands, on the other hand, allows them to fantasize about what their American futures might be. Mayer paints a picture of young women using utopian fantasies inspired by *NSYNC as a bridge between what they experience as their generally unsatisfactory options on the street, and a better place where men are polite, love is transfiguring, and inequities based on ethnic discrimination evaporate. Despite the clarity with which readers may see the improbable fantasy generated by the "boy bands," it is impossible to discount its power. This fantasy appears to be the most effective motivating factor available to these young women for realizing their ideals. Mayer's research can serve as a model for future consideration of the intricate negotiations that marginalized populations undertake with the blatantly racist, sexist, and generally fantastic images of life generated by the American mass media.

The SACA video project was ultimately abandoned because of the difficulties it faced. For this reason, *Producing Dreams, Consuming Youth* is important as a commemoration of its existence; the book itself being one of the positive results of San Antonio's brave and idealistic venture. The book also fills a gap in cultural studies projects: in terms of the relationship between ethnicity and the media, very little has been written on Mexican-American communities, and nothing of this depth has been written about the specific community in San Antonio. Although Mayer sometimes slips into unnecessary jargon, her work is noteworthy for its combination of textual readings and sociological research; it slights neither the media nor the socio-economic conditions it proposes to study.

MARTHA P. NOCHIMSON is the author of *No End to Her: Soap Opera and the Female Subject* and *Screen Couple Chemistry: The Power of 2*. She is currently completing a study of gangster movies in Hollywood and Hong Kong.

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The Searchers: Essays and Reflections on John Ford's Classic Western

Edited by Arthur Eckstein and Peter Lehman. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004. $29.95. 440 pages.

Why *The Searchers*? *The Searchers* holds a special status among the canonical American films of the late1950s—films such as *Vertigo* (1958), *Rio Bravo* (1959), and *Psycho* (1960) that inspired a generation of film school "movie brats," became objects of fetishization among auteurist cinephiles, and obsessed academic film scholars. This is because *The Searchers*, like *Vertigo*, is driven by the obsessions of its central character, and by a quasi-romantic, nearly maniacal desire that seemingly possesses the narrator—Ford or Hitchcock—as

issues: the determination of the young people that this not be just "another boring documentary," and the efforts of some of the most enthusiastic members of the crew to block the circulation of the finished video outside of their circle of family and friends. Much of the participants' anger at being treated as second-class citizens was channeled into a resistance to including English subtitles in the Spanish-language parts of the video. After the young video artists compromised by using both English and Spanish subtitles, two of them steadfastly refused to attend any of the public screenings of their video until they knew from the buzz of approval that they wouldn't be humiliated.

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well. Insofar as the narrator is caught up in a kind of controlled delirium, so is the spectator. The unique appeal of *The Searchers* lies in its essential irrationality, its mystery, its refusal of conventional narrative logic. Nowhere is this clearer than in the responses to the film found in an engaging new anthology of essentially adulatory essays on the film edited by Arthur Eckstein and Peter Lehman.

Though the new-historicist essays cover a broad range of topics, including last-minute alterations of the screenplay, John Wayne's persona, the landscape of Monument Valley, and the film's musical score, a number of individual authors focus on one crucial aspect of the film—Ethan's stated intention to kill his niece Debbie—and on the decisive moment at the very end of the film when Ethan seemingly reverses himself, picks Debbie up in his arms, and takes her home. Though the appeal of the film cannot be reduced to only one of its many mysteries, the contributors' various interpretations of this apparent about-face provide a good sense of the interests and approaches represented in the anthology.

Co-editor Arthur Eckstein beefs up his introduction with original research that compares Frank Nugent's shooting script with the final version of the film. Eckstein convincingly argues that Ford deleted scenes that endowed Ethan with heroic traits (for example, a scene in which he condemns the cavalry for massacring innocent Comanche women and children) and added scenes that make him seem harsher, meaner, and less sympathetic (e.g., a scene in which Ethan scalps Scar). Eckstein notes that in Nugent's script, Ethan's decision to spare Debbie is "explained" by a line of dialogue that was cut in the final film: "You sure favor your mother." In Nugent's version, then, Ethan doesn't kill Debbie because of her resemblance to her dead mother, Martha, the woman Ethan once loved.

In an excellent essay on music in the film, Kathryn Kalinak similarly explains Ethan's decision to rescue rather than kill Debbie in terms of a reference to Martha—this time on the film's soundtrack, where "Martha's theme" accompanies Ethan's gesture of lifting Debbie into his arms. "Martha's theme" is, in fact, a reworking of a Civil War-era song, "Lorena," popular among Confederate troops. "Lorena" was a love song that spoke of a lost/forbidden love ("We loved each other then, Lorena, more than we ever dared to tell"). But what does a reference to Martha at this particular moment in the film mean? In her thoughtful essay on "What Would Martha Want," Gaylyn Studlar explains that Martha embodies the "Christian ideals of compassion and love," and that these values ultimately "'speak to him [Ethan]' at the very moment he is determining whether Debbie will live or die." In rescuing Debbie, Ethan himself is rescued by Martha's values—feminine values of forgiveness that trump his own "racist, avenging masculinity." Martha represents family, and it is family that Ethan recognizes when he picks up Debbie and takes her home.

For Martin Winkler, it's not Martha but Homer who makes sense of Ethan's sudden change of mind. Winkler compares Ethan to Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*. Just as there is no satisfaction for Achilles after he has desecrated the body of his foe, Hector, in Book 24 of the *Iliad*, so Ethan's mutilation/scalping of his nemesis Scar does not assuage his blood lust. Much as Achilles' "gesture of raising Priam from his kneeling position" signals a recognition of emotional kinship with the grieving patriarch, so Ethan's gesture of lifting Debbie affirms their *actual* kinship. "The ties of kinship are stronger than the urge to kill." A number of scholars have cited Ethan's gesture of lifting up Debbie as an explanatory moment. The gesture and the touch of her flesh serve as triggers that unleash memories of family and feelings of kinship. The fact that this is the same gesture Ethan uses to greet Debbie as a child in the film's second scene gives persuasive support to this reading.

But, as Peter Lehman reminds us, readings of Ethan's motivation that invoke Martha or kinship attempt to explain an action that ultimately has no explanation. Re-reading Eckstein's evidence (Ethan's statement that Debbie resembles Martha), Lehman correctly points out that Ford decided to cut that line of dialogue. By eliminating the line, Ford tacitly refused to explain Ethan's behavior, ensuring the action's essential incomprehensibility. Like the song lyrics heard over the opening credits ("What makes a man to wander?"), the film raises questions that it never answers. For Lehman, the film is about the limits of knowledge—and Ethan emerges as its central enigma.

Lehman's reluctance to clarify that which is profoundly mysterious is eminently preferable to David Grimsted's insistence that there is no mystery, that Ethan never intended to kill Debbie, and that Ford deliberately misled the audience about Ethan's desire to kill Debbie. In this way, "Ford created a subtler story where audience misinterpretation would create the climactic excitement." Grimsted's Ethan is not a dark anti-hero but "a liberal democratic hero," characterized by "decent caringness," but tragically flawed by his racist attitudes.

Functioning like a third editor, Grimsted concludes his essay with a running commentary on the other articles in the anthology, judging some to be helpful to his own understanding of the film and others to be downright irritating. Among the latter, he singles out in particular "Freudian" interpretations (Scar as Ethan's Id figure) and readings of the film that view it as an expression of national phobias about miscegenation (such as that by Douglas Pye). Grimsted's own review of the Western genre suggests an American fondness for (rather than phobia about) interracial romance, suggesting that "American audiences had long seen red-white interracial sex as readily acceptable, or titillating, or telling about social injustice, rather than taboo." Grimsted's arguments are not compelling.

Not every essays focuses on Ethan and Debbie. Richard Hutson's discussion of Monument Valley views the landscape expressionistically, as an extension of the characters associated with it. Like Ethan, the buttes are "ruins" that evoke a past that continues to survive into the present. Like Ethan, they are remnants of a lost whole that has been eroded by time. The anthology concludes with an essay by Tom Grayson Colonnese on Native-American reactions to the film. Touted

by the publisher as the first published response to the film by Native Americans, Colonnese and his group bring a fresh perspective to the film that productively complements that of traditional scholars. For example, instead of wondering why Ethan changes his mind about Debbie, they wonder why Debbie suddenly changes *her* mind. When Ethan and Marty talk with her near Scar's camp, she tells them to go away, explaining that the Comanche are now her people. But then, a few scenes later, she abruptly agrees to go "home" with Marty. Presumably, Ford and 1950s America could not understand a white captive preferring to live with the Comanche rather than with whites. Colonnese's study group also wonders why the Navajos who play the Indians in Scar's tribe speak Navajo rather than Comanche. Perhaps, as Lehman suggests, the questions provoked by the film are more interesting than any of the answers we might provide?

The best book on the making of *The Searchers* continues to be Ed Buscombe's BFI monograph (2000). The anthology edited by Eckstein and Lehman contains great original research (Eckstein, Kalinak) and reprints of seminal essays (Henderson, Pye), but it omits crucial pieces by Andrew Sarris, Joe McBride, and Michael Wilmington. The definitive essay on the film has yet to be written. That'll be the day.

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Wong Kar-wai's Ashes of Time

By Wimal Dissanayake, with Dorothy Wong. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003. $37.50 cloth; $14.95 paper. 173 pages.

Wong Kar-wai is one of the most distinctive auteurs to emerge in contemporary international cinema. Fittingly, two of his films—1994's *Ashes of Time* and 1997's *Happy Together*—have already received scholarly treatment in Hong Kong University Press's new series of monographs, The New Hong Kong Cinema. To date, the series (under the general editorship of leading scholars of Hong Kong film and culture Ackbar Abbas and Wimal Dissanayake) has also published books on John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), Tsui Hark's *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983), and Fruit Chan's *Durian Durian* (2000). Beautifully designed, with covers that represent the name of the press in English in artist Xu Bing's trademark syncretic "square word calligraphy," these monographs assist in the canonization of exemplary Hong Kong film texts from the important period that began in the 1980s with the impending end of British colonialism and the "return" to China. Comparable to the British Film Institute's Film Classics and Modern Classics series, these short books by respected scholars of films offer intensive analyses deemed cultural landmarks. Further, as the series editors explain in their preface, The New Hong Kong Cinema texts recognize and historicize cinematic accomplishments comparable to those of early Soviet cinema, postwar Italian Neorealism, the French New Wave, and the new German cinema of the 1970s. Dissanayake's volume, like Karen Fang's on John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow,* is an extremely valuable contribution to the scholarly study of Hong Kong cinema. (For the sake of shorthand, I hereafter refer to Dissnayake as the author of this book, although the plural pronouns "we"/"our" are used throughout, and Dorothy Wong is credited as having made a significant contribution to the volume as translator of some texts from the original Chinese.)

Organizationally, *Wong Kar-wai's Ashes of Time* includes chapters on the film's background, story, characters, narrative structure, and style, as well as martial arts, and the themes of "time," "melancholia," and "fragmentation." The penultimate chapter focuses on the reception of the film, and appendices—including translated published interviews with director/screenwriter Wong Kar-wai, film editor Patrick Tam Kar-ping, art director Chang Suk-ping, and music composer Frankie Chan—follow a brief concluding chapter that ties together some key conceptual strands. The book opens with eight well-chosen color stills that are evocative of what Dissanayake calls "the most forbiddingly and uncompromisingly difficult among [Wong Kar-wai's] creations to date." Wong, of course, continues to make stylish and challenging films that garner international attention; during the period since the publication of this book, he has also directed the futuristic *2046* (2004) and a short called "The Hand" for the omnibus *Eros* (2004), together with Michaelangelo Antonioni and Steven Soderbergh. His latest project, sharing its title with a classic by another famous auteur, is *The Lady from Shanghai,* reportedly, at the time of writing, to star Nicole Kidman.

Wong's film *Ashes of Time* (*Dongxie Xidu*) is based on the popular fiction by Louis Cha (a.k.a. Jin Yong) and, the director claims, was also inspired by John Ford's *The Searchers.* Dissanayake resists calling *Ashes of Time* an "adaptation" in a conventional sense, and throughout the volume deftly employs poststructural theories (e.g., Derrida on signature and counter-signature, Deleuze on time-image and movement-image) to discuss Wong Kar-wai's auteurist achievement. The prismatic approach of looking at the same film chapter-by-chapter vis-à-vis story, characters, narrative structure, etc., gets somewhat repetitive at times. There is also some loss of focus when it comes to the appraisal of the film's critical reception; the author's central point seems to be that *Ashes of Time,* while receiving negative and/or mixed reviews upon its initial reception, has been subsequently recuperated by Hong Kong film scholars, who have perceived its significance retrospectively in light of Wong's other work. *Ashes of Time* features a pantheon of familiar stars—including the two Tony Leungs (Chiu-wai and Kar-fai), the late Leslie Cheung, Brigitte Lin, Maggie Cheung, Carina Lau, Jacky Cheung—and the stunning cinematography of the director's longtime collaborator Christopher Doyle, as well as Wong's now familiar brooding sense of loss.

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vorite of Wong Kar-wai's films, and I am convinced after reading this book that repeat viewings will yield rich intertextual insights when "we connect it to the earlier and later works" (14). Further, *Ashes of Time*'s play with the syntax of *wuxia* (swordplay-focused narratives set in the past) is not only in dialogue with previous Chinese films but also prefigures the sensational international success of Ang Lee's transnational neo-*wuxia* film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), and Zhang Yimou's high-profile epic forays into the genre with *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004).

The "Background" chapter in Dissanayake's book, in my view, is one of its great highlights, as it provides fascinating information about the international texture of the funding and distribution of *Ashes of Time*—the way, for instance, casting was affected by contractual obligations to distributors. The story of Hong Kong critic/filmmaker/distributor Shu Kei's "rescue operation" of the film demonstrates an amazing intervention. And history repeats itself in the tale of Wong's postponements with the Venice Film Festival due to *Ashes of Time*'s constant re-edits—foreshadowing the notorious challenges Wong's down-to-the-wire tendencies recently posed for scheduling at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. Given the convoluted narrative of *Ashes of Time,* the "Characters" chapter helps sort out who's who (aided by a diagram of their entanglements provided in Appendix 2).

More biographical background on Wong's formation as a filmmaker (and a full filmography of his works to date) would be a welcome addition to this book, as would further discussion of the collaborative aspects of his work and of the specific cinematic techniques of cinematography, editing, and sound he utilizes. The "Response" chapter offers a cross-section of some critical reactions to the film, as well as the summarized results of a survey of university students in Hong Kong conducted by the author. While the excerpted student responses are interesting to read, more contextual information about this study would make the data more meaningful. Nevertheless, despite this minor shortcoming, the students' words are reminders that this film is indeed worthy of study in an academic context, and deserves to be acknowledged alongside Wong's more celebrated works.

By all indications, the books in Hong Kong University Press's The New Hong Kong Cinema series seem to be achieving their objectives. Because of their attention to detail and depth of analysis, these monographs can work for readers before or after they have seen the films. However, my recommendation would be to read afterwards—as an inspiration to watch again.

ANNE CIECKO is an associate professor in the Department of Communication and the Interdepartmental Program in Film Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

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